

Sermon – Trinity Sunday – June 7, 2020
In search Of Trinitarian Understanding

The doctrine of the Trinity is drawn out of the biblical revelation centered in the experience of God as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier. That seems simple enough but it is far from helpful or conclusive. For why else would so many preachers, theologians, and writers quake if the task was so simple. Especially if the task is to explain the three in one of the Trinity while we also acknowledge that the word “Trinity” is not found in Holy Scripture.

Most of us have a pretty solid grasp of God as Creator. Look around we can see the magnificence of the created order – sun moon and the planets in their courses ...

In much the same way we know about Jesus as the Redeemer, the head of the church who sent the Advocate on Pentecost to bestow upon us the gift of the Holy Spirit. That is where we begin as we try to absorb the meaning of divine power that we cannot see or hear. For most of us then, to appreciate the Holy Spirit is a challenge.

Ann Spivack wrote in Readers Digest – While our friends from India traveled around California on business they left their daughter with us. Curious about my going to church one Sunday morning, She decided to come along. When we returned, my husband asked her what she thought of the service. I don't understand why the West Coast isn't included too, she replied,

“You know, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the whole East Coast.

With that bit of levity out of the way let's begin with this wisdom from Herbert O'Driscoll, an Anglican priest, hymn composer and theologian:

We do not think about the Trinity so much as experience it. Only then do we understand. And here is the paradox, that we understand the Trinity most when we realize that we do not understand.

The first experience of the Holy Spirit was when the Apostles caught a glimpse of the Spirit at Pentecost as they fanned out into the streets of Jerusalem and then throughout the whole of the Roman empire. As this expansion of the faith solidified differences of understanding emerged. It took centuries to have most of the whole church in agreement. What we now know as the Apostles and Nicene creeds took years to settle. And this was guided by the Holy Spirit. Therefore while we may not understand every aspect of the Spirit's movements we do know that one crucial area of the Spirit's presence is how the Faith is protected in truth. While there are many theories or theologies not all are faithfilled or edifying or Biblical sound.

Therefore knowledge of how the Holy Spirit's guidance manifests to protect the church is important but it is not what is most important. As O'Driscoll points out it is how we experience it, not how much we understand.

In the year of 1273 a Dominican philosopher and theologian completed his *Summa Theologia*.

38 Treatises

3 thousand articles

10 thousand objectives

It was a massive undertaking and Pope Pius 5th officially declared Thomas Aquinas a doctor of the Church. But one day in 1273 he had an experience of the Holy Spirit and stopped writing and researching. As the psalmist said, His knowledge is too wonderful for me and Thomas had a Beatific Vision and returned to a monistic life not to write again.

Here is another approach that took root as a part of the evolving theology of what we call Pentecostalism and how the Holy Spirit pours out divine love upon us and Christ's church. This approach was adopted in 1914 by the emerging Evangelical/Pentecostal movement and came to be known as the Jesus only movement.

The "Jesus Only" movement, also known as Oneness Pentecostalism or oneness theology, teaches that there is only one God, but denies the tri-unity of God. In other words, oneness theology does not recognize the distinct persons of the Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It has various forms—some see Jesus Christ as the one God, who

sometimes manifests Himself as the Father or the Holy Spirit. The core doctrine of Oneness Pentecostal / Jesus Only is that Jesus is the Father and Jesus is the Spirit. There is one God who reveals Himself in different "modes."

This teaching of the Jesus Only / Oneness Pentecostals has been around for centuries, in one form or another, as modalism. Modalism teaches that God operated in different forms or modes at different times—sometimes as the Father, sometimes as the Son, and sometimes as the Holy Spirit. But passages like Matthew 3:16-17, where two or all three Persons of the Godhead are present, contradict the modalistic view. Modalism was condemned as heretical as early as the second century A.D. The early church strongly contended against the view that God is strictly a singular person who acted in different forms at different times. They argued from Scripture that the tri-unity of God is evident in that more than one Person of the Godhead is often seen simultaneously, and they often interact with one another (examples: Genesis 1:26; 3:22; 11:7; Psalm 2:7; 104:30; 110:1; Matthew 28:19; John 14:16). Oneness Pentecostalism / Jesus Only doctrine is unbiblical.

The concept of the tri-unity of God, on the other hand, is present throughout Scripture. It is not a concept that is easily grasped by the finite mind. And because people like everything to make sense in their theology, movements such as the Jesus Only movement—not to mention the Jehovah's Witnesses—regularly arise to try to explain the nature of God. Of course, this simply cannot be done without doing violence to the biblical text. Christians have come to accept that God's nature is not subject to the limitations we might

like to put on Him. We simply believe Him when He says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts'" (Isaiah 55:8-9). If we can't understand His thoughts and ways, we accept that we cannot fully understand His nature, either.

After Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit, the word "God" was simply not adequate to describe the Apostles experience. The basis of faith had to be widened. Faith seeking understanding had to be stretched. No longer would a strict monotheism work as people sought to describe a "threefold activity of relationship" with the One God.

Over time the Apostolic community handed down – and mediated to the world – an experience of God under three aspects of the Divine Personality. This undivided God could and did do the work that defines what we mean by Father, Son and Holy Spirit that is, the work of Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier/Empowerer.

Ultimately, the Trinity is not something that can be fully explained. Only God knows God. God's self is uncompressible. Pascal wrote "by faith we know of God's existence. In glory we shall experience God's nature. Until then, let us affirm the Nicene Creed, make the sign of the cross over ourselves and bless everything in the name of the Holy Trinity. And also take note of the words of Vincent van Gogh. The best way to know God is to love many things.

Now unto God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit be ascribed as God's most justly due, all power, might majesty and dominion, now and forever. Amen Come Holy Spirit. COME.