

Sermon for Trinity Sunday  
May 18, 2008  
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Genesis 1:1-2:4a  
Psalm 8  
2 Corinthians 13:11-13  
Matthew 28:16-20

Do you believe in magic? There was a song back when I was growing up by that title. I love magic. I can't do it, but I like to see it done. It's an illusion. It's not real. What I believe in is mystery. That's what today is all about: mystery.

It's Trinity Sunday, and it's all about the mystery of who God is.

I never thought much about the concept of the Trinity growing up. I just figured it was like water existing in three forms: a solid, a liquid, a gas; ice, water, steam.

Jeff Averhoff gave me an equally good example. Did you every break a thermometer? You see all those little balls of mercury scooting around. They do just fine on their own, but when they touch each other, smoosh – they all become one: separate and the same.

That's how the Trinity of Father, Son, Holy Spirit became doctrine starting in 325 at the Council of Nicea. They were trying to figure out how Jesus Christ could be fully human and fully divine, and how Christ could be at once separate and united with the Father, and how the Father and Son could be separate but united with the Holy Spirit.

The Scriptural justification for the idea of the Trinity came from the readings of Matthew and Paul that we heard today where we get the three differentiated. The word for Trinity does not appear in the Scriptures, but the Scriptures do insist that there is ONE God.

So how did they meld the three together into one? That's a toughie. The suggestion that provided the answer for the first gathering of all the bishops of the church came from the Emperor Constantine. He'd actually called the council because he wanted the bishops to come up with a way of defining who was and who was not a Christian.

Constantine suggested the use of the term Homoousios, which meant that the three were of one substance or essence rather than using the term homoiousios, which would have indicated that they were of similar substance.

So given the Emperor's nod, the bishops developed wording that defined the three as one and one in three. We say it resulting creed each week: the Nicene Creed. With modifications over the years by various councils, the Trinity became the doctrine for defining God.

I don't know that it really matters to most Christians. If the doctrine were to disappear tomorrow, would it matter?

I was reading a meditation this week preparing and digesting the lessons. The meditation began by talking about a traffic accident. A man was driving along, his eyes on the road, paying attention and being the consummate driver, when suddenly he comes to a stop sign and doesn't stop, but drives through. Immediately his car is struck broadside by a truck that had no stop sign. The man had been so focused on the road directly ahead of him that he had not seen the reality that was careening toward him.

I think that's what happens when we try to lock the mystery that is God in a box and define God in human terms. We lock our eyes on the definition and we fail to see the obvious reality around us.

It's like the Nicene Creed. It seems more than good enough for me. It's a workable definition of Christianity and God for us.

Of course, that wasn't good enough for everyone. There were those who wanted to lock down not only the words, but also the meaning – so we have in the historical documents in the back of the Prayer Book a thing called The Creed of Athanasius. \*

Take a look sometime. As you can see, in small print, it's still a full page long. I won't read it to you, but it says what the Nicene Creed says, but it repeats it and rephrases it multiple times.

We see some of that around the Christian church today. We see people arguing over not only the words, but the meanings of the words, and not only the words that are said, but what people are thinking when they say the words.

In the beginning was THE WORD, it says in the Gospel of John. And in today's Genesis reading we see those first three words as they open the Bible: In the Beginning,

Why are we reading about creation today? Hardy asked that question at Bible study Wednesday. My only answer was that it says "Let us create humankind in our own image."

And it says that in this first of two creation stories in Genesis. And there it is: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply."

In case you were wondering, the Adam and Eve and the Rib are the second creation story. This first one was placed before the second to provide a lens for reading the creation of man and woman as co-equals – not as one gender being better than the other.

In these two creation stories we see God in two forms. In the one we read today we see a God who is transcendent: out and away from us, creating with the mention of the word. In the second creation story we see a God who walks with us, who molds humanity from the clay of the earth. This is a God who is imminent: right here with us, sharing our journey and walking by us every step of the way.

So which is it? That's the mystery. It's both. So what's the Trinity for us? A mystery.

## **\* The Creed of Saint Athanasius**

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.

And the Catholic Faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost.

But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost.

The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate.

The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible.

The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Ghost eternal.

And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal.

As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible.

So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty.

And yet they are not three Almighties, but one Almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God.

And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.

So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord.

And yet not three Lords, but one Lord.

For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be both God and Lord,

So are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion, to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten.

The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten.

The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Ghost, not three Holy Ghosts.

And in this Trinity none is afore, or after other; none is greater, or less than another; But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.

He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man;

God, of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Substance of his Mother, born in the world;

Perfect God and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting; Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching his Manhood.

Who although he be God and Man, yet he is not two, but one Christ;

One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the Manhood into God; One

altogether, not by confusion of Substance, but by unity of Person.

For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead.

He ascended into heaven, he sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies and shall give account for their own works.

And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.