

**Sermon for Trinity Sunday, version 2**  
**26 May 2024, St. Luke/San Lucas**  
**Isaiah 6:1-8; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17; Psalm 29**

Lord, take my words and speak through them,  
Take our thoughts and think through them,  
Take our hearts and set them on fire.  
Amen.

Today is Trinity Sunday, and I have a confession to make. I have always struggled with the concept of the Trinity. In diaconal formation, we spent an entire term studying the doctrine of the Trinity. We read hundreds of pages written by theologians across the ages. We watched video lectures from numerous professors. We questioned and researched and debated and, in the end, most of us admitted to being just as confused as when we'd begun. And we are not alone.

In church history, we learned that the doctrine of the Trinity has been—and continues to be—controversial. Differences over the Trinity were an element in the Great Schism, the Orthodox-Western divide. The Orthodox insist that the three parts of the Trinity are perfectly co-equal which, I admit up to this point, I had thought that we in the Western church also believed. But there is that problematic phrase in the Nicene creed, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son...” If something proceeds from, comes out of, is commanded by, is it lesser than? So, is it co-equal? My brain hurts.

Where does that leave us, other than searching for the aspirin? I decided to take a different approach, recognizing and openly acknowledging the limitations of my mind and leaning into that space. God is, by definition, beyond human comprehension. God is bigger than we can grasp, wider, deeper, higher, more powerful, more loving, more everything. But we

humans try our best to wrestle the unknown and the unknowable into something we can handle, we can grasp, we can name.

According to my high school Bible curriculum, there are over fifty different names for God given in the Bible—and interestingly enough, the Trinity isn't one of them. God is addressed as The Almighty. The King of Creation. Love. The Word. Wonderful Counselor. The Prince of Peace. All contain truth. All reveal aspects or characteristics of God that are relevant to that particular time and space. All have been recorded for us, shared with us, in Scripture and in the writings of others who have known God throughout their lives.

An analogy that resonates with me comes from the fable about the blind men and the elephant. Originating in what is now India, this tale is known to most of us from the poem by John Godfrey Saxe<sup>1</sup>. In it, various blind men approach an elephant and, using only their sense of touch, describe what, to them, the elephant is. One runs into the side of the elephant, feeling the solidity, the height and breadth of the animal, and announces that an elephant is like a wall. Another, encountering the trunk, long, supple, warm, insists that an elephant is like a snake. A third, feeling the ear, large, thin, flapping back and forth, proudly declares that an elephant is like a fan. And so on, through the various parts of the elephant's body, with each blind man insisting that he knew what an elephant was.

The poem continues with the insight that, "... these men of Indostan, disputed loud and long, each in his own opinion, exceeding stiff and strong, though each was partly in the right, and all were in the wrong!" In their limitations, with only partial knowledge, using only their sense of touch, without their sense of sight, they had an incomplete understanding of truth. They missed the enormity, the completeness, of what an elephant is. And rather than listening to each other, combining their observations to create a more complete understanding of what the elephant was, they chose instead to argue, to let their differences divide.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://allpoetry.com/John-Godfrey-Saxe>

Looking at the Trinity as an inadequate human effort to name the unnamable, to know the unknowable, I can see glimpses of truth in the various persons, or aspects, of the Trinity. God is certainly parent-like. God is the Creator, bringing life into humanity. We are made in the image and likeness of God, just as each of us carry traits of our parents. Just as parents provide wisdom, instruction, and occasional correction to their children, so God throughout the Bible provides humans with guidance on how to live a fulfilled life, in communion with God and with others. When we, in our inadequacies, do something wrong, our parents may be angry, may impose punishments, but throughout, they hurt for us and continue to love us. Does any of this sound familiar? Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham and Lot, David.... The parent, or Father, image is clearly found in our Scriptures and at times is the personage of God to whom we can relate most easily. God is the loving parent.

The second person, or aspect, of the Trinity is the Son, Jesus Christ, also very relatable for most of us human beings. The incarnation bit, God in human form, both fully human and fully divine, can be a bit mind bending, but on a good day, still within the grasp of a feeble human brain. I sometimes think of Jesus as the perfect, or perfected, human being—what we are meant to be. Jesus is who we strive to be. The perfect Son of God. Once again, an aspect of God to whom we can relate, whom we can try to emulate, whom we admire. God is Christ, the Son.

The Holy Spirit, the third person, or aspect, of the Trinity, is a bit more of a challenge for my brain. Described in various parts of the Scriptures as breath, wind, inspiration, the Holy Spirit is the aspect of God that exists in every living human being. It is what gives us life. It is what connects us to God. Always present, even if we don't always access its power, its love, its grace. The Spirit is a bit more nebulous, less concrete in a way, than other aspects of God, yet still, by exercising those brain muscles, reaching, reaching, understanding is there. The Holy Spirit is that part of God that lives within each and every one of us. God is the Holy Spirit.

So, we come, at last, to the key question for today: who is God? To us? To me? I recognize that, with the limitations of my human mind and experiences, I miss the enormity, the completeness, the fullness of the Divine. And it is easy to let our differences in how we see, how we describe, God divide us.

Yet, even in my incomplete understanding, in my human imperfections, there are some things that I do know: God is love. God is with me. And whether your experience of God is the same or different, God loves you and is with you, too.

I'd like to close with a prayer:

God of heaven and earth,  
before the foundation of the universe,  
you are the triune and life-giving God:  
Author of creation, eternal Word of salvation,  
and life-giving Spirit of wisdom.  
Guide us to all truth by your Spirit,  
that we may proclaim with our lives  
all that Christ has revealed of your love.

Praised be you, O Holy Three, now and forever. Amen <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://christchurchtacoma.org/household-worship-trinity-sunday/>