

Readings: Psalm 8, Genesis 1:1-4, Matt 28:16-20, Roman's 8:12-17

One of the most basic, yet misunderstood or ignored, doctrines of the Christian faith is that of the Trinity. The term is not one found in the Scriptures although what the term is used to describe most certainly is. Today we will see that this concept is of particular importance to us in our understanding of who we worship, who we are as a community and in the view, we have as Christians, of the world. The racial and societal inequities, violence and medical challenges the world is facing right now can be seen through a particular lens when we understand the concept of the Trinity.

We start then with the Scriptures and a correct and important fundamental understanding of the Hebrew people. The text of Deuteronomy 6:4, called the *shema*, is the great affirmation held by both Jewish and Christian people. It states, **“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.”** Unlike many cultures and religions, we do not hold to a plurality of gods or divine beings, there is only one God. However, when we read in Genesis 1 that God created, we are challenged as to how this Oneness is to be understood. It's a minor but fascinating point that the linguistic technique used here, maintained by Jewish and Christian scholars through history, uses a singular and plural together in a way that is done extremely rarely. The word “God” (*Elohim*) is singular but the word for *created* is plural. It's like saying *God they created*. An awkward way of saying the one-plural God created everything. The first two verses of the Scriptures go on to expand on that single plurality. We are introduced to God as the *Almighty Creator* and as *God the Spirit* hovering over the waters. In Proverbs 30 verse 4 the writer asks, **“Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son's name?”** The Son of God is also associated with the world's creation. Later, writers in the New Testament make this explicit. In John's gospel the opening chapter records that Jesus, the Word made flesh, was with God in the beginning. The apostle Paul, author of the epistle to the Colossians, speaking of Jesus says, **“For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”** (Col 1:16-17).

Understanding this was not just a challenge for us, it was a significant matter of consternation for the early church. In fact, much of the theological debate of the first four centuries, throughout the Christian world, was over how just to define and live with this conundrum.

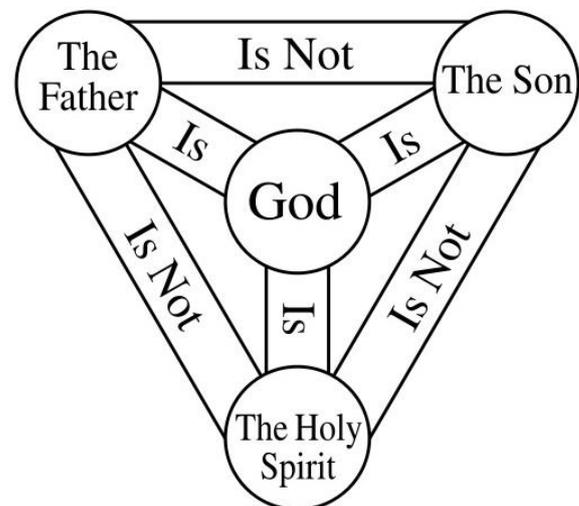
There are two aspects for us to consider here: the ways God has decided to communicate with us, and the things that we can learn about God. This should lead us to some very practical realizations about the nature of not only our Christian lives but indeed all of life.

Let's start by acknowledging that God, in dealing with humanity, has chosen three specific ways in which to relate and communicate with us. In the Old Testament we meet God as the Creator, Lord of history, as Father and Judge. God is, for most, remote and at a distance, generally mediated by prophets, priests and kings. Then, in the New Testament God comes to us in the person of the incarnated One, God made flesh in Jesus. Jesus lived amongst us, suffered, died and became the “Resurrected One”, the source of God's salvation for all. Then thirdly, after Jesus had ascended, He sent the

Holy Spirit as helper and intercessor, releasing the power of God for the new life God offers us. In each of these three ways God has revealed something of His nature and character. God has given humanity different opportunities to come to know Godself. Some have taken these opportunities, others have ignored them, or worse acted deliberately against God's intent.

While the theological niceties of this understanding of what we now call Trinity took centuries to refine, the early church had little doubt what God wanted and what Jesus had taught. Almost immediately the new understanding of three-in-one or one-in-three, even if not so concisely articulated as Trinity, became central to Christian faith. In the Great Commission the disciples were told, **“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”** (Matthew 28:19), a triune blessing. In the apostolic benediction, of 2 Corinthians we see the well-known words, **“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”** (2 Corinthians 13:13). Again triune. While formal theology may have taken a while to catch up, practice and the common shared understanding was there from the start.

From a practical side of things, we are given great insight into the One we worship and who God is. God is not a human being but in Jesus has fully experienced life as a human being. God is not limited to physicality but fully understands our frail bodies and character and can walk with us in person, as counsellor, helper, guide even friend. God is also the Almighty, so powerful, so majestic, so God, so far beyond our thoughts and imagining that we can't even go there. God is the ultimate other and intensely personal at the same time. After all God is God. God is Spirit and must be worshipped in Spirit and in Truth. In all of this something critical is revealed: God is intensely personal and intrinsically relational.



The three sided triangle imagery sums it up very well. God as Father is distinct from God as Son and God as Spirit yet all are equally and fully God. What theologians would call three modes of the self-disclosure of God. The early church fathers used the Greek term *homoousios* to describe all three as being of “one essence”.

Let's ground the implications of this then in our lives today: what does it mean, what does it matter? As Christians we are invited to partake of God's Kingdom as co-heirs with Christ, not equals mind, but children of God nonetheless. As Jesus is the

first-born we look to Him as the model of how we are to live. As there is difference but no inequality in the Trinity so there can be difference but no inequality amongst us when together we live the life Christ has imparted to us. In our Spirit we long for this to be true in real terms but in the fleshly life we live it is so often not the case. With this in mind we can understand Galatians 3:28 stating, **“here is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”**

When we look at the issues facing many parts of the world regarding racism and inequality we recognise that racism is a blot on humanity. God created us as equals, all of us. Sin and corruption, be it in the garden of Eden, at Babel, or ever since, has drawn humanity apart, put us at odds with God and with each other. In Christ and His kingdom that is reversed and the world is put to rights. “Look around you”, you might say, “the

world is hardly put to rights". True, but then the world is not walking according to the Word or the Spirit. John Lennon's song *Imagine* depicts an image of a world of peace and harmony that many long for. It will not, cannot, happen by human will alone. Humanity is too flawed at its core, too corrupt and self-centred. We might also reflect on the fact that humanity also has a very real enemy who works to stop the world being at peace or coming to know God. Real change requires not just will or effort but the transformative power of the Holy Spirit within us, within communities, to bring about lasting change. Recognising this, Jesus said, "the Kingdom of God is within you".

I have said before and I say it again: one of the greatest witnesses we have to the community, as a small church, as the Body of Christ, is the love and care we have for one another. Our unity in worship, across any number of racial, socio-economic, educational and other divides speaks volumes to the world. No, we don't have it perfect. Yes, sometimes people say and do things that are not appropriate and we remember that people are at all sorts of stages in their faith journey and that's ok. Our forgiveness, given and received is profound and fundamental. But then, more of than not, we do get it right and we grow together even more. The love that is expressed is seen and shared by others, even outside our faith community.

We are not meant to all be the same. We are not carbon copy robots of each other or even of Jesus. We are created uniquely and every person, every life, is precious in God's sight. From the variety of our personalities, our backgrounds, our differing life experiences, strengths and weaknesses, talents and abilities, we are called together to be the people of God. In this we are called to love one another, to forgive one another, to walk humbly before our God... and it is the same for all without distinction. We cannot use racial or demeaning language because that denies who we are ... fellow pilgrims with all of humanity before God. But nor are we called to create a false equality by dragging everyone down to the lowest common denominator. That helps no one. Rather we want the best for all people and work to that end, seeing each man as a potential brother, each woman as a potential sister. In our difference we pour out a unique best to God that no one else can do and that is beautiful in itself. When we encounter injustice, we are called to speak out and act against it as is appropriate to our own situation. Hopefully, we do not do this alone but with the support of each other.

In the Trinity we see a beauty of unity and interaction that surpasses anything on earth. Some theologians have described it as the most beautiful of dances, a tapestry too beautiful to fully appreciate. It is a foretaste of heaven, when the ultimate of relationships with God and with each other will be experienced. We do not worship multiple gods as other religions and some cults believe but rather the One, True God, Father, Son and Spirit who calls us to joyfully join the dance and make a difference in our small corner of the world ... just as Jesus has and does.

Amen