

So, today is Trinity Sunday.

This is a Sunday that increases your pastor's blood pressure.

You see, I worry that this is one of those days where you'll come to church, hear about a heavy theological doctrine and then rest assured in the knowledge that I will explain it to you and all will be well.

The problem is that I can't explain the trinity to you, and part of me feels like I am failing you because I *should* have a concise answer for you.

But then I rest assured in the knowledge that it's been approximately 2,000 years and to this day, no theologian or lay person has been able to clearly explain/define the Trinity, so maybe it's okay that I can't either.

But I will tell you a few things about the Trinity that I do understand and they might be helpful for you.

So, I know that God is relational.

Jesus' ministry was relational.

I know that we cannot understand God outside of our relationships with other humans.

I know that in Genesis chapter 1, verse 26, "God said, 'Let *us* make humankind in our image, according to *our* likeness.'"

Even way back then, God was plural.

So for me, the idea of the Trinity, of God being multiple manifestations, which intersect and engage with each other is helpful because it gives me different ways of accessing God.

Sometimes I look into the vastness of the night sky or I think about something, which is too big for me to wrap my head around, and this omniscient God who was and always shall be, who was there before the beginning, that's who I need.

And when I am connecting with other people, helping them, serving them, discerning how I should respond to systems of injustice, that's when I need Jesus

He helps me figure out how to follow the will of that huge, great-beyond God, in this body, in this life, in this reality that I am experiencing.

It's helpful to have Jesus, another human, to relate to.

And then, when I am listening to a beautiful piece of music that moves me, or I can feel the energy in the room of a powerful worship service or I am sitting vigil with someone who is close to death, I feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in that space.

The Spirit is close, intimate, with us, immersed in this reality but just beyond our five senses.

So I do find the trinity helpful, but because I am a curious person who will never be satisfied with simple answers, I can't help but ask the question, where in the world did the Trinity come from?

And then I remember that this whole concept came from people just like you and me.

I want to share this quote from Bishop John Shelby Spong's book, Unbelievable, he writes,

*"Is [the Trinity] a truth about God or is it a description of human experience?"*

*Is knowledge of God's being ever a human possibility?*

*Are not definitions of God always definitions of human experience?*

*Theology thus is always about my understanding of God; it is not about God.*

*The doctrine of the Trinity, therefore, describes a stage in the evolution of human experience.*

*It was certainly not a revealed truth, nor was it the way the earliest Christians understood God." (Pg. 72-73)*

Then he goes on to explain how the Apostle Paul was not a Trinitarian.

So, you see, the Trinity comes from regular people who were trying to figure out God in their time, after they'd had the experience of Jesus.

These people weren't more connected to God than you and I are.

The Biblical authors didn't receive the theology of the Trinity in a dream directly from God and then immediately wrote it down in a notebook that was on their nightstand so that it could be remembered and understood for the rest of time.

They wrestled and questioned and wondered and squinted and pondered and shook their heads and probably got headaches, just like we do, when they were trying to figure out how to apply words to this God-experience, which is beyond words.

And, in different parts of the New Testament, they came up with God, Jesus and Holy Spirit.

In today's text that we heard from First Letter of John (which is different from the Gospel of John), we heard spirit, water and blood.

Did you know that the Trinity was interpreted in that way in the Bible?

God is water, Jesus is blood and the spirit is the Holy Spirit.

And you want to know why John used those words to explain this 3-in-1 concept?

Because he was trying to show that Jesus did not come only as a spirit, but he came as a human, in the flesh.

He was reacting to what we call Docetism, which is the belief that Jesus didn't exist in literal human form, it's the belief that he did not walk this earth with 10 fingers and 10 toes, but that his form was an illusion, like a ghost.

But the writer of this letter said no, he was here, in body, you could have pinched his arm and it would have hurt.

That's why the passage we heard said that Jesus Christ did not come with water only.

Water is the omniscient God.

Jesus wasn't only a God-figure, but he came with the water AND the blood.

He was God AND human.

Not just a God-like illusion that was beyond the human experience.

So he conceived of the Trinity in a way that was helpful for him and the earliest Johannine community.

A phrase that all of this reminded me of is that Bible was written by people about a holy God, it was not written by God about a holy people.

So. We are people too.

Why can't we theologize about this holy God too?

We can! Nothing is stopping us.

The Bible is meant to inspire us, and help us connect with God and our forbearers, but it doesn't mean that all theological wrestling had to end when it was compiled.

God is not static, neither should our beliefs be.

I think we have a responsibility to reinterpret these ancient themes in light of our modern times.

So for John and his followers, it was important that he emphasize Jesus' humanity, so he described the Trinity as water, spirit and blood.

And so I asked myself, what is important for me to emphasize about God?

What are 3 ways in which I understand or connect with God?

Might this help me come to my own personal understanding of the Trinity?

And so I did this interesting thought experiment, I came up with three ways in which I acutely feel God's presence.

Instead of Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer or Father, Son, Holy Spirit, or Water, Blood, Spirit, I came up with Sweat-Maker, Joy-Creator and Affirmer.

What in the world does that mean?

Well, here goes... First, God is the embodied Sweat-Maker.

I realized that when I am using my body among others who are using their bodies, whether through exercise or manual labor, I feel more connected to them and to myself.

The experience of exerting myself is cathartic.

It draws emotions out of me, which connect me to God and all that is around me.

When I am sweating and struggling, it reminds me that I am alive and this life is temporary and these muscles won't be strong forever, so I need to live this life to the fullest, doing my best, each day, to worship the God that I know and love.

So, that's the first part of my Trinitarian God, the embodied sweat-maker.

The second part is the Joy-Creator.

I feel God so acutely when I am celebrating other people's joys.

When I am able to witness to their accomplishment, or achieving a life goal, or just doing something they're proud of, that experience is exhilarating and I feel like it deeply connects me with the divine.

In just these past few weeks, I've actually experienced a few such sacred moments.

The first one was when I arrived at the hospital just hours after Kelly Sievert's baby was born.

Seeing the sense of joy and accomplishment on her face, even amidst exhaustion, was a beautiful thing.

And anyone who has held a newborn who is just a few hours old, they have seen the face of God.

Nothing reminds you of the miracle of life quite like that.

Another time I was able to witness to joy was at my younger brother's college graduation last week.

I did get emotional when he walked across the stage.

But I was even more moved (don't tell him this), by their class graduation speaker.

A man named Miles spoke, he was the head of the Black Student Union and he's from Somalia and he recently got awarded a Fulbright Fellowship.

He didn't think he'd ever go to college let alone in the United States, and hearing him speak of his experience and receiving the Fulbright and then watching him walk across that stage to get his diploma, the hairs were standing up on the back of my neck.

God was present with us under that big, white tent.

So anytime I can say "Yes!!" along with someone else because they have achieved a dream or a milestone or a goal, God is there.

That's my second part of the trinity, when God is the Joy-Creator.

And last but not least, the third part of the Trinity as I understand it for my life right now, is God as the Affirmer.

I say that because when I am able to affirm others and tell them that they matter and they're worthy and they have something to offer this world, I often feel like it's not me talking, but I am just a channel of God's love.



AND.

It's two-sided, this goes back to God being relational.

As much as my ego might like it, it's not only about how I affirm others.

It's also a sacred moment because that person allowed me the privilege of telling them this truth, and they listened and they were hopefully able to believe, even for just a moment, that they do really, really matter.

I definitely feel the presence of God in those interactions, and so the last piece of my Trinity is The Affirmer.

I invite you at some point during your week to think about 3 ways in which you connect with that, which is holy.

Just as our forbearers came to know God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit as one way of understanding the divine,

may your Trinity be a way in which you connect with that which is beyond us.

Amen.