

Sermon Draft

Text: John 8:48–59

Sermon: Trinity Sunday 2022

The Christian truth of one divine substance and yet three divine persons is a doctrine beyond reason and yet not contrary to reason. Any illustration about the Trinity may capture the truth of this biblical teaching in some ways, yet it will likely fall short in other ways. In the history of Christianity, the mystery of the Trinity has sometimes been illustrated by an equilateral triangle.

Such a triangle has three equal sides and angles, although one geometrical figure. Sometimes the triangle is enhanced with three concentric circles. Thereby, the one triangle represents the one divine essence, and the circles represent the three persons. Christians have also employed images from nature to illustrate the Trinity. An apple has skin, the meaty fruit, and the seeds within this one single apple. Space consists of length, breadth, and depth. Time consists of the past, the present, and the future.

Islam misses this reality of the Trinity when it emphasizes the unity of Allah as expressed in mathematical terms (that God must be one). Using simple arithmetic, Islam would note that $1+1+1=3$. Thereby, Muslims say, one immediately runs into the falsehood of three gods, tritheism. But even mathematics can serve to demonstrate the Christian view of the Trinity, since $1 \times 1 \times 1$ still equals 1.

Holy Trinity Sunday concludes the Time of Our Lord (Christmastide and Eastertide) and begins the Time of the Church in the liturgical calendar. Or Holy Trinity begins the Time of the Church, after the Time of Our Lord concludes with Pentecost, depending on your point of view. Holy Trinity Sunday is a pivot point, connecting heaven and earth, a time of seeing how the very nature of God is living and active in our lives within this fallen creation. It is a day for worshiping God's revelation as three persons who are together one divinity, one God. It is a celebration of the Father's gift of his only-begotten Son for the salvation of sinners, and for the sending of the Spirit to enlighten our hearts and minds with his gifts.

Sitting as it does between the two great blocks of the church year, this is a Sunday to pivot our attention from the works of God in Christ and the Spirit to what he is accomplishing here and now in and for us. The Sundays in December through June have been looking at God's works in Christ. The coming Sundays will reflect on the work the Lord is doing in his people, what the triune God is doing in us.

The goal of this day on the liturgical calendar is not to explain or merely describe God's triune nature. Holy Trinity Sunday exists that we might speak clearly of God's nature in three persons and what that means to a humanity created, in the beginning, in the image of that triune God.

American author Orson Scott Card is not a fan of most modern science fiction, despite writing many science fiction books himself. What bothers him most is that the heroes of the books and movies are often rugged individuals, disconnected from family or friends, going about their adventures on their own. Card wonders where the hero's husband or wife, children, siblings, and childhood friends are to be found.

It is not good for man, even a science fiction hero to be alone. Therefore, through Jesus' dialogue with the unbelieving Jews in our text for this Trinity Sunday, God reveals His Triune nature that we may be not "me" but "we" with Him.

We prefer to be Me: We live in a me world. Our present culture thrives on individuality. People are getting married later and later, if at all. In 1962, half of 21-year-olds were already married. Today that percentage is a lot less.

Have you ever heard the term, Sheeple, blending sheep and people, it is a term that has come into usage for an individual that unthinkingly "goes with the flow" instead of charting his or her own path. Sheeple are those who have lost their individuality and just want to "blend in."

We is better than Me: It is not good to be alone. Four hundred years ago, the English writer John Donne wrote a famous poem about individualism. You might know at least the beginning and the end, not realizing they come from the same poem.

*No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe*

is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind.

And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

No man is an island. When one man dies, it reminds that humanity is dying.

The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). To be alone is, in some ways, to die.

God is not a Me: Our holy Lord does not reflect this sinful individualism.

Because our sin can drive us to be “rugged individuals” disconnected from one another, we assume God, too, is a “rugged individual.” We speak of our Lord as God, Him, He, the One.

Then, on Trinity Sunday, we squish three persons into this one, rugged individual. In some mysterious way, like the parts of an apple or a three-leaf clover or the phases of water, our one God is also the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

But in the Garden, the Lord said, *“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness”* (Genesis 1:26). Man was created male and female. One, and yet two. In marriage, the two become, once more, one (Genesis 2:24) because it was not good, the Lord said, for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18).

God is a We: The Father begets a Son through whom comes the Spirit. The Jews had a hard time understanding Jesus as the Son of the Father, because they could not let go of the ideas they had about God. The Muslims, too, struggle with the Tri-unity of God.

“They have certainly disbelieved who say, ‘Allah is the third of three.’ And there is no god except one God” (Qur’an 5:73). This is why Jesus’ use of the Divine Name for himself was so repulsive. How can he be the “I Am”? But in a mysterious wonder, our Lord is in fact three persons in one divine substance. The Lord is the Father who eternally begets the Son through whom comes the Spirit. In Jesus, we see God for who he really is, just as Abraham did in his day.

We, like Abraham, abide in Jesus’ Word. The devil would have us be by ourselves, islands, disconnected, kept apart. The devil tells us that to be like God is to be alone. He tells us we can be free to do whatever we want, no matter the people around us.

They can be safely ignored in favor of our personal choices and freedoms. This is a lie. The Word of the Lord is that we know the Father through the Son, who knows the Father perfectly (v 55). This is the truth.

The Father freely sends his Son into the world to redeem us. The Son willingly gives up his life on the cross to free us. The Spirit is willingly breathed out that he might live in us. By the power of the Spirit, we keep the Father's Word, Jesus, in us. This is what it means to have eternal life, and the promise of never tasting death (v 52). It is not good to be alone.

So, Jesus has made us one with his Father by the sacrifice of the cross, and by enlivening our faith by sending the Spirit into our hearts.

The hero of the Gospels, unlike heroes in so much fiction, is not alone. Jesus does not stand by himself. He is glorified by his Father and honors him by keeping his Word. He turns to us and invites us to hear the true promises of his Father, to know the Father through his one and only Son. Abraham knew God not as a "he" but as a "we." Now we do as well, through the Word of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen