

# THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

May 26, 2024



## TRINITY

*the Three Personas of God*

by Drew Downs

Much of how we understand the nature of the Trinity comes from Greek thought. And in particular, the terms: person and persona.

We talk about the Trinity as three persons, which evokes three individual people. But we also speak of them as personas, or masks, that can be worn by the same person.

This language can be confusing when left at that level, but we ought to consider that

these words are not only of the same root, but kind of say the same thing.

This might seem weird in a culture of hyper-individualism, but three persons being one is not as mind-bending an idea when we aren't obsessed with keeping everything separate, specialized, and different. When we entertain what we share in common.

We is as natural a concept as I.

# ORDINARY TIME

2024

## WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way  
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

**Trinity Sunday**

The doctrine of the trinity isn't complicated. God is one. God is three persons; most commonly known as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

It isn't complicated, but it defies our expectations for nature. Most of us find this unsettling, if not confusing. Because things *aren't* three and also one at the same time. At least, not in this way.

To make sense of it, we turn to images, metaphors, nature for guidance. But these don't work because none of it fully embraces the root of the challenge. The Trinity is a kind of a paradox; it is two simultaneous, unending truths at once. God is three and one. Always and never not.

So the Trinity isn't like water, the sun, or a leaf—metaphors we use to make sense of something confusing, but it isn't! It is an unexplainable mystery which defies the limits, not only of our logic, **but of our definitions**. Our definitions limit God. God as Father limits God TO a father, for example. But this same limiting we use goes the other way. A monotheistic singular God is limited FROM being Father. In other words, we struggle because we don't want to actually deal with the problem itself: us. Our language and the limits of our way of thinking.

Better than defining the nature of God, the church has offered images which explore the character of God. Images of connection and love, dancing and serving. And it is in these images for each person of the Trinity which help us far more to know and understand God.

With love,  
Drew

# ORDINARY TIME

2024

## FOR SUNDAY

*Trinity Sunday*

May 26, 2024

### **Collect**

Almighty and everlasting God, you have given to us your servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of your divine Majesty to worship the Unity: Keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see you in your one and eternal glory, O Father; who with the Son and the Holy Spirit live and reign, one God, for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

### **Reading**

John 3:1-17

There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

# ORDINARY TIME

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And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

## Reflection

Preachers all over the world have a tall order this week. They don't just have the Good News to preach, but they must also make sense of the doctrine of the Trinity. Which continues to mystify and confuse the faithful.

Our gospel reading isn't the most obvious place to start, but it does offer an interesting touchstone for the greater project.

Nicodemus, one of the most powerful and learned people in Jerusalem, comes to Jesus for guidance. And even he is stuck in literalistic thinking, distracted by factualities, and missing the bigger picture Jesus is trying to communicate.

Sounds like our obsession with *understanding* the Trinity as a literal, physical, material matter to be diagramed and “solved” like a math problem. How else might we try to figure out how something can be three and one at the same time?

Of course, math isn't the subject. And it isn't the only tool for comprehending a divine mystery. It is but one part of a greater whole. One persona, perhaps, for our own sense of common self—how we learn about ourselves, our world, and all that is around us.

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