

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

May 26, 2024 (Holy Trinity Sunday, Year B)

Today is Holy Trinity Sunday. This is a day that has been celebrated in the Christian church since the 9th century. This is the day we get to talk about the Trinity, about WHO God is. So to begin, I have a little instructional video for you.

(Show St. Patrick's Bad Analogies)

I show that video EVERY year on Trinity Sunday. It's a reminder that every time we try to EXPLAIN God, DEFINE God, we fail miserably. It took the brightest and best of the church over 300 years to come up with our creeds, and Christians have been trying to understand them ever since.

I'll admit it (and any pastor telling the TRUTH will agree with me), Holy Trinity Sunday is the most DIFFICULT Sunday of the ENTIRE church year to preach. It's because this Sunday is the ONLY Sunday devoted EXCLUSIVELY to a DOCTRINE – not a story, not an event, not even a commemoration of a person, but a DOCTRINE.

Now, doctrines are supposed to EXPLAIN things. But not THIS doctrine, not the TRINITY. You can't EXPLAIN GOD, so by DEFINITION, you CAN'T explain the Trinity.

But that's okay, because our FAITH in God NEVER WAS intellectually assenting to a set of PROPOSITIONS about who God is anyway, because GOD never WAS a set of propositions.

You see, the doctrine of the Trinity isn't as much about WHO God is, as it is about WHAT God DOES. GOD LOVES. God is INHERENTLY communal. God IS relationship. God IS love. One God in three persons, whose shared, mutual, and sacrificial love overflows and spills out into the WORLD for ALL people. God IS community.

And we, who are created in God's image, CRAVE that SAME community. We are knit together in our mothers' wombs with a NEED for love.

I heard a speaker say once that young people today don't need the CHURCH for community anymore; they can consume community ANYWHERE these days. I suppose that with the rise of so many technologies that claim to FACILITATE communication, you might THINK that – that we would feel MORE CONNECTED than people in decades and centuries past. But the facts don't bear that out.

Around 2018, before Covid hit, a survey conducted by the health insurance company Cigna concluded that "Americans are a lonely lot." Over 50% of those surveyed responded that they "feel alone or left out always or sometimes." The survey results also suggested that the average sense of loneliness is progressively HIGHER as you look at younger and YOUNGER generations. We COMMUNICATE MORE than at any time in human history, but we're ALSO becoming more and more lonely.

And that trend has gotten MARKEDLY WORSE AFTER Covid. We returned to public life, but we are even MORE ISOLATED.

How can that be? How can we spend so much time with other people and not feel connected? Because COMMUNICATION is NOT the SAME as CONNECTION, and not the same as COMMUNITY.

This is what sets the church apart. Most communication these days is limited to people with whom you KNOW you agree, who like the same things, who THINK like you. But community in God's CHURCH is COMPLETELY different. In the church, we gather with people we MAY DISAGREE with; we gather with people who may THINK in COMPLETELY DIFFERENT ways than WE think; we gather with people we may not even LIKE all that much. But we gather with them ANYWAY, because

our gathering isn't ABOUT US; it's about the ONE in WHOSE NAME we gather. CHRISTIAN community is about something BIGGER than us, something more IMPORTANT than us.

And so today God isn't demanding that we believe something; God is inviting us INTO the SHARED love and life of the Trinity.

God's VERY BEING, WHO GOD IS, this one-God-in-three-persons, reveals that God is ALL ABOUT COMMUNITY. And since you were created in God's image, and baptized in the NAME of that triune God, YOU are meant to be in community too.

You know that sign of the cross that we make every time I say the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit? There's ANOTHER MEANING for that gesture. As you make the sign of the cross, remember these phrases:

God in my head

God in my heart

God on my left

God on my right

We talk a lot in church about getting God RIGHT in our heads, and getting right WITH God in our hearts, but when you are sitting in a church sanctuary, what is on your right SIDE? And on your left? Another person. You online worshippers, imagine the FEELING of this worship space. We ALL have people, fellow believers, on our left and on our right. In Christian community, God CONNECTS us with those people and binds us together. We are all one in Christ, through our baptism.

And the TRUTH about God is that God tells us MORE about himself through our NEIGHBORS than in THOUSANDS of years of creeds and classes. Even as a pastor, I can say that I've learned more about God from knowing CHRISTIANS, than I could have learned from ANY book.

We are all figuring this out together. We learn who God IS by SEEING God in one another. We were made in God's image to BE IN COMMUNITY. God IS community. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we are one. Amen.