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Holy Trinity

Sisters and brothers in Christ, let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, as I noted in the announcements, today the church observes the Festival of the Holy Trinity.

And the Trinity is just one of those things with which we are not sure what to do.

For the Trinity is a mystery.

The Trinity speaks of God as Three-in-One, One-in-Three.

The Trinity speaks of the Godhead as both one divine being, but also at the same time three divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

How can that be, right?

That doesn't make sense. That is beyond the scope of human understanding.

In fact, there have been many-a-description of the Holy Trinity that have come down to us over the ages, but with any analogy used to describe any thing, eventually the analogy breaks down because the analogy doesn't describe perfectly that thing.

Take, instance, the image of an apple that is sometimes used to describe the Trinity, where the three parts of an apple are meant to represent the Trinity.

The three parts of the apple being the skin of the apple, the flesh of apple and the core of the apple or the seeds of the apple.

That analogy, though, breaks down because just the skin, or just the flesh, or just the seeds of an apple are not the whole of the apple.

But each person of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—each person is fully God in and of themselves.

PAUSE

Now, sometimes an egg is used to describe the Trinity where the yolk, the white and the shell are meant to represent the three persons of the Trinity.

But the egg analogy suffers from the same failing as the apple analogy, because again the yolk is not the whole of the egg, nor the white, nor the shell.

Or, consider the image of a three-leaf clover.

The clover has three leaves where each leaf is equal to the other two, and together the three leaves form a whole clover.

But this, too, suffers the same failing as the other analogies, in that each leaf alone does not make for a whole clover.

So, let's try another image—that of three interlocking rings.

Each ring is still a ring in and of itself. Just like each person of the Trinity is fully God.

But bring the three individual rings together, and you have three rings.

Bring the Three persons of the Trinity together and you don't have three gods, but you have one God.

PAUSE

And then there is the triangle, which is another shape that is used to describe the Trinity, but the triangle suffers as an analogy much in the same way that the images of an apple or an egg do.

Because the one shape of the triangle is no longer fully a triangle when you separate the three angles or the three sides.

But again, if you separate the one God into the three persons of the Trinity you still have the fullness of God in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.

PAUSE

Now, the other thing that is truly lacking with any of these analogies we have mentioned, the other thing that is lacking is relationship.

The people of God have a relationship with the Triune God, but what relationship do we have with an apple, or an egg, or three interlocking rings, or with a triangle.

That is just silly.

So, the importance of relationship is lacking in all the analogies we have looked at thus far.

So another way to attempt to describe the Trinity is as a person say a woman, who is a “mother,” and a “daughter,” and let’s say an “attorney.”

The woman is in relationship with her daughter, and to her daughter she is known as “mother.”

The woman is in relationship with her own “mother” and to her mother, the woman is known as “daughter.”

And the woman is in relationship to her clients and to them she is known as their “attorney.”

All well and good, right?

The woman is still one woman, but she also expresses herself in three ways—mother, daughter, and attorney.

Much like, the Trinity is one God, but expresses God’s self in three ways.

And, we also capture the importance of relationship in this analogy.

But unfortunately this analogy also breaks down.

Because we get into something called “modalism.”

Modalism is the idea, the false idea about God whereby the persons of the Trinity represent only three individual modes or aspects of the divine.

In other words, God the Father is called the Creator.

God the Son is called the Redeemer.

And God the Holy Spirit is called the Sanctifier.

But all three persons were there at the time of Creation.

God the Father spoke Creation into being.

But the Word God the Father spoke is the Son.

And the Word God the Father spoke was carried on God's breath which is the Spirit.

So all three persons were there at Creation, so it is misnomer to say that God the Father alone is the Creator.

The same can be said with respect to God the Son as Redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier.

To limit a certain activity of the Godhead to only one person of the Trinity is to succumb to modalism, where each person of the Trinity has a certain mode of operating.

And that just is not the case.

So, where does all this leave us?

If nothing describes the Trinity perfectly, why do we even bother trying to talk about the Trinity at all?

Chalk the whole thing up to a mystery, and let's move on.

PAUSE

But, I think that does not do the Triune God justice.

Obviously the Church at some point felt it was necessary to recognize the Trinity as significant, so significant in fact that we have this festival we celebrate every year called The Holy Trinity.

We come together today and we celebrate the Godhead who has been revealed to us as One-in-Three, Three-in-One.

And maybe the best any of us can do with respect to describing the Godhead is for each and every person to choose whatever it is that is one's favorite analogy for the Trinity—apple, egg, rings, triangle, etc.—while recognizing that that image is not perfect.

And so, that is what I want to do this morning as well.

I want to share with you my favorite analogy of the Holy Trinity.

It is an analogy that is actually an icon painted by Andrei Rublev in the 15th century.

And if you have your smart phones, I encourage you to take them out now...

This may be one of the few times I actually invite you to use your phone during worship.

Now, don't worry if you don't have a smart phone, I will describe the image. But do take out your smart phone, if you have one, and do a Google search by typing in name Rublev, spelled R-U-B-L-E-V, and the word "trinity."

Don't just do a search of "Rublev" or you are going to get a professional tennis player by that name.

Personally, I love tennis, but that isn't what we are looking for.

And once you have typed in "Rublev" and "trinity," press enter, and you should see an image come up of three angelic beings sitting around a table, with a cup in the middle of that table.

Now the image here is Rublev's depiction of the Trinity.

But what inspired the painting is the OT story of the three angels that visited Abraham at the Oak of Mamre as told in Genesis 18:1-8.

You can read that passage again at your leisure, Genesis 18:1-8.

So, this icon, as I understand it is relational, right? Because here we have three angels inviting the viewer to be in relationship with the Godhead as the Godhead is seated around this table.

Yes, what is truly profound here, and I don't want us to miss this...what is truly profound here is that the Godhead is inviting us to be in communion with itself.

And that point is made all the more powerfully when we consider that Rublev may very well included a "mirror" on this painted icon.

For if you look at the image of the icon on your phone you see that there is a small rectangular shape on the front side of the table under the cup.

Scholars note that something has been lost there. Either that something was removed or fell off at some point, who knows?

But this lost thing it is believed may have in fact been a mirror, all the more suggesting that we are invited around the table with the three angels.

I love this icon.

I love this depiction of the Trinity for it is not static like so many other images of the Trinity, like a triangle, or three rings.

I love it because God, in all three persons, is inviting us to be in relationship, inviting us to be in communion with the Godhead.

PAUSE

You see, sisters and brothers in Christ, Christianity is powerful, is powerful, and mystical, and mysterious, and wonderful because as believers we are meant to be in communion with God, we are in fact meant to be seen as inside the Godhead.

Now, this is where our theology gets a little tricky, so bear with me.

You see, we as Christians are regularly spoken of being “in Christ.”

We speak about believing “in Christ.” But that is not just something whereby we say, “We believe you, Lord. We believe what you are telling us. We believe in you.”

No, believing in Christ is meant to situate us literally inside the Godhead.

Faith is not just a cerebral activity, whereby if we think the right way, we are saved.

No, Christianity really is participation within the Godhead.

The apostle Paul spoke of Creation as groaning in birth pangs.

And he may have used that image of pregnancy so as to emphasize that we are in God.

Much like an infant before birth is *in utero*, we also are in utero, if you will. We are inside God.

Furthermore, Luke quotes Paul in Acts 17:28, saying these words: “In him (in Christ), we live, and move, and have our being.”

So, you could almost say that the Trinity is actually a quaternity, wherein the fourth part of the Godhead is the church, is the people of God, who are in God.

But a quaternity crosses the line into blasphemy, because of course, we are not gods, we are not divine.

But the Scriptures does indeed say that we as people of God exist inside God, we have communion with God.

And this is why, for instance, baptism is such a powerful ritual, because we are baptized into Christ Jesus.

Baptism is the process by which we come to acknowledge our relocation into God.

And if we are inside God, honestly then what need we fear in this world.

Nothing...nothing can separate us from the love of God, because we have been baptized into Christ Jesus.

And so, for me, this painted icon by Rublev is my favorite analogy for the Trinity.

I love it because of the image of being in communion with Godhead.

I love it because it reminds me that whenever we look in a mirror, remember that what you are seeing is your face, and that face exists in the realm of the divine all around you.

You and I have communion with God. You and I are inside God, because we have been baptized in the triune name of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God. Amen.