

"How Big is your God?"

Isaiah 6:1-8; Ps. 29; John 3:1-17
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Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church
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Today is Trinity Sunday. The idea of the Trinity is one of the most illusive and misunderstood doctrines of the Christian Tradition.

Earlier in our service we sang about "God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity". Sometimes we try to explain what the "persons" and work of the Trinity is all about by outlining the history of our human experience of God in Scripture along these lines:

"First there is the God of the Old Testament - a wrathful, judging, no-nonsense God. Then the God of the New Testament shows up in Jesus Christ - a loving and forgiving God who sacrifices his life so that the wrathful God of the Old Testament will have no choice but to forgive us. And then there is the ever-present God of the Holy Spirit, wafting in and out, inspiring God's people and guiding and supporting us day by day."

But, to lean too heavily on this kind of shorthand explanation of the Triune God is to play right into the hands of the critics of Christianity who have been saying for 2,000 years that we are really talking about 3 gods, not One.

Even so, in spite of some of its drawbacks and pitfalls, we hang onto Trinity as a way of expressing our understanding of the nature and the work of the One God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So then, where does the doctrine of the Trinity come from and what does it mean?

The word "Trinity" itself does not occur in Scripture. It is hard to find a place in the Bible where all 3 persons of the Trinity appear together. It seems almost as if the Triune God in Scripture is like one of those movies where the main character has to be two different people at the same time and the comedy ensues as he or she tries to keep up appearances by keeping all the balls up in the air at the same time with quick costume changes and a clever use of mirrors.

But, setting those film scripts aside, since the earliest beginnings of the Church, Christians have pointed to places in Scripture for support in affirming this doctrine that we celebrate today.

Perhaps the most specific reference is in Matt. 28 when Jesus gives his disciples the Great Commission and commands them to baptize "in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

At the time of Jesus' baptism we see the Son of God standing in the water, we hear the voice of God the Father from heaven saying: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" and we see the Dove of the Spirit descending and resting upon Jesus.

We can look elsewhere in Scripture and find echoes of Trinity sufficient to undergird the validity of the doctrine as a way of understanding God.

But the interesting thing is that our search through the Bible to find evidence for Trinity will also uncover a wealth of other images and names for God that are also useful in helping us understand the work and person of the God whom we worship and serve.

These other names and images are important because, while we certainly don't want to discard Father, Son and Holy Spirit as one of the cherished expressions of our understanding of God, we also don't

want to run the risk of violating the 2nd Commandment by creating an idol out of the language we use to speak of God.

We need a big understanding of God, big enough to have room for the many varied ways in which God chooses to reveal Godself to us.

For centuries Christians have sought to understand God in ways that reflect their experience and take us beyond anything which would limit our ability to have deeper and fuller communion with God. Consider for example how theologians as far back as the Middle Ages proposed expanding the language of the Trinity by speaking of God as "Fire, Light and Heat", or "Composer, Singer and Song", or "Speaker, Word and Breath".

Whatever metaphors or analogies we may come up with, they are ultimately just that: metaphors and analogies - feeble and limited attempts to get our minds around something that cannot be fathomed.

Robert Farrar Capon - one of my favorite theologians - likens us to a bunch of oysters trying to describe a ballerina - we simply do not have the equipment to understand something so far beyond us.

But, even so, we still try.

We try because we have experienced a Truth. And the Truth that we have experienced and that lies behind the Trinity is the Truth found in one of the first things that most of us learned about God: "God is Love."

The doctrine of the Trinity speaks of the God of Love. It displays the perfect communion of the God of love. It shows us the perfect unity, harmony and continuity of God who loves the world so much that we are given Jesus Christ as the deepest expression of God's desire to be

with us and for us and the Holy Spirit as God's continuing loving presence working in and through us.

What's more, the doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that the true divinity of God is realized in community. And if our God is a God of community, and if we are made in the image of this communal, loving God, then our true humanity is also realized most fully in community.

We are not made for isolation. We are made to worship and glorify, serve and enjoy our God forever - together!

We live in an age and at a time when there is an increasing amount of privatization and when personal choice and personal judgments are - for many - the court of first, last and final resort. When community is discounted and connecting with God through the Church is dismissed as irrelevant, we need to remember the Trinity and move beyond thinking only of ourselves.

We need to remember that we are made to be in relationships with those around us and with our God who is continually reaching out to us, inviting us to join in the dance and to see the Love that is behind the steps, the Love that lives at the heart of it all, the Love that is big enough to gather us up in a joyful embrace and set us free to be the women and men that God intends us to be.

How big is your God? Big enough to be the Great Policeman, but not big enough to be the merciful Judge? Big enough to be the Eternal Killjoy, but not big enough to be the Great Life of the Party? Big enough to always be away on the other side of the galaxy attending to affairs somewhere else in the cosmos, but not big enough to have his eye on the sparrow and on you and me too?

God is big enough to pay special attention to those who are the apple of

his eye. And oh, did I mention that you are the apple of God's eye?

Friends, we need to go beyond mere words, beyond mere doctrine, beyond any limitations we may place on God or any reasons we may have to think that God doesn't care about us or desire the very best for us so that we, together, may serve our big God in a big way -- today and everyday with energy, intelligence, imagination and love.

Let us pray.