

## Trinity Sunday

A sermon by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on Trinity Sunday, June 2, 1996.  
Scripture Lessons: Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

I preach this morning in fear and trembling. Everybody has their gifts and talents and one of Rev. Carter's gifts is that he preaches with the Holy Spirit and with power. I'm strongly tempted to try to preach like Rev. Carter. I will resist that temptation. I'll preach like myself - with a manuscript.

This is an extremely busy Sunday. It's Communion Sunday. One reason we're worshipping with Second Presbyterian Church is so we can share the sacrament of Holy Communion. The Confirmation class meets with the Session after the worship service. We'll be registering children for Daily Vacation Bible School after the worship service. We welcome, not only Second Presbyterian Church, but also Dr. Funzo Oluyitan from Nigeria by way of Lincoln University. The Membership Development and Evangelism Committee will also be hosting a reception for all of us. And tonight we'll all regather here for an event of great music.

This is also Trinity Sunday in the Church year. The Church year begins with Advent when we remember how God the Father prepared the way for the birth of his Son. After Advent comes Christmas when we celebrate the birth of Jesus. Then comes Epiphany when we remember how God manifested himself through Jesus Christ. After Epiphany comes Lent which begins with remembering how Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by the devil and leads up to Holy Week and the Easter season when we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus. After Easter comes

Pentecost Sunday when we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit. And that brings us to today - the Sunday after Pentecost Sunday - Trinity Sunday.

Christians believe that God is a Holy Trinity. We can not and do not speak of God generically. Christians can not speak of God without reference to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Christian worship is Trinitarian worship. For example, this morning we sang, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty... God in three Persons, blessed Trinity." After the Declaration of Pardon we sing, "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost." Before I preach I recognize that I'm preaching in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. After the sermon we confess the historic faith of the church in the words of a Trinitarian Creed like the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed. Last week I baptized Danielle MacFadien in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We end our prayers with a Trinitarian formula in which I attribute all glory and honor to God the Father through Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit. At the end of the worship service I lift my hands to give the Trinitarian Apostolic benediction: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us.

We are unequivocally a Trinitarian church. We believe that we can't know God apart from the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

We believe in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is not the Father. And yet we believe that God the Father is God; the Son is God; and the Holy Spirit is God. Yet we believe, not in three, but one God.

We believe that before God created the world the one God existed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God did not create the world because God was lonely. Before the world existed - before humankind came on the scene - God loved the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christians believe that only God is to be worshiped. We must not make anything or anyone other than the one God the object of our worship and prayer. And yet we worship and pray to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as well as God the Father because these three are one God. We don't pray to three Gods, but to one.

I can't explain the doctrine of the Trinity. That shouldn't keep us from believing. There are many things I don't understand but believe. For example, I failed high school physics. I couldn't make heads or tails of what was going on. I couldn't understand my high school teacher. I couldn't understand the text book. I got an E in high school physics. And yet I believe in gravity. I know that if I were to jump out of an airplane I'd fall to the ground. And I believe in centrifugal force. I know that if I take a curve too fast I'm going to roll the car. I believe but I don't understand.

My faith in the Trinity is like that. It's not a blind faith. I know that apart from Jesus Christ I could never recognize who God is. I know that apart from the Holy Spirit in my life I'd never repent of my sins and turn to God through Jesus Christ. I can't speak of God without reference to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In fact, I believe that unless the Second Person of the Holy Trinity became a human being I could never know God or have eternal life. If there were no Holy Spirit we'd all be lost.

It would be a lot simpler if Christians simply believed in one unitary God rather than in one Trinitarian God. It would be a lot simpler to confess that God created the world and that Jesus was simply that greatest and most compassionate person who ever lived and that the Holy Spirit is some impersonal force. And yet Christian communities that have attempted to simplify our understanding of God in that way tend to dissolve in a kind of vague and general religiosity.

My prayer and hope is that each one of us will come to know God the father, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and be drawn into the church, communion of the Holy Spirit.

Listen to the words of Jesus himself. After he rose from the dead and before he ascended to heaven, Jesus told his followers, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

Jesus wants us to belong to him. Jesus wants us to be his disciples. He wants us to obey him. He doesn't want us to

muddle along with an indefinite, generic understanding of the God we belong to. Jesus wants us to be baptized and marked with a definite name - the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

How do we get to know the one true God who is revealed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit? In prayer. When we pray, the one we're trying to get in touch with is God. But if we're a Christian, we know that God is also prompting us to pray. We also know that all our real knowledge of God comes through Christ, the Man who is God.

God is the One to whom we're praying. God is also the One in our hearts prompting us to pray and leading us to repent and follow Jesus. And God is also the One beside us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Praying to the Father, prompted by the Holy Spirit, through the Son, Jesus Christ - this kind of prayer is nothing less than fellowship with God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Let's seek fellowship with God right now in prayer.

Triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - we marvel at the mystery of your being and the wonder of your love. You have no need of anyone or anything, and yet you created all things and all people out of the overflow of your love. And when we sinned against your love and violated your commands, you acted to draw us back into your love and to life us into eternal life and to make us partakers of the divine nature. Holy Father, you chose your people in love and planned our salvation and set your plan in motion. Thank you. Lord Jesus, Son of the Father, you became one of us to earn our salvation and to make us children of God. Thank you. Holy Spirit, you apply this salvation and make our hearts your temple. Thank you. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.