

First Sunday After Pentecost Trinity Sunday, Year C

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Romans 5:1-5

Canticle 13

John 16: 12-15

Jesus said, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”

The Believer’s Truth

Right after this sermon, we will recite the Nicene Creed. This Creed and the Apostle’s Creed are statements of our basic beliefs about God. Trinity Sunday is a good time to think about these Creeds and what truths they reveal.

When I first came to the Episcopal Church I did not know much about what Episcopalians believed. I only knew that the service was like the worship service of my childhood and so every Sunday, I just followed along and did what everyone else did. I stood when everyone else stood. I knelt when everyone else knelt and I prayed, sang, and took communion never thinking about the relationship between what I was doing and what I believed. I just knew that the worship service was familiar and that it felt good to be a part of it. In truth, worship was what I did only on Sundays. It was a day separate from the rest of my life and it was a long time before I connected my beliefs with my daily actions or choices the rest of the week.

Then one day, while reciting the Nicene Creed, I suddenly thought, “Do I believe this to be true?” For a while, I would not say the Creed because I realized that I could not explain the Trinitarian relationships imbedded within. How could I say I believed something I did not understand? Each Sunday I would question myself, “Can you honestly say the Creed with conviction? No? Why not?” “I cannot explain how the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the one God of our forebears”. “I’ll just listen.”

I remember once asking someone about the Trinity, what they thought, how it worked, and what they believed. Their answer was, “It is a mystery.” I thought to myself, “Humph. They don’t know any more than I do, and I do not know anything at all.” This spiritual tug of war went on for quite a few years. I wanted to believe. I wanted to faithfully say the Creed, and I wanted to understand why the Trinity is the way, the truth, and the life. Three natures, one God, how can that be?

Then one day I gave up the struggle and just decided to believe the words of the Nicene Creed. It was not quite a “Fake it till you make it scenario” rather I decided to embrace the mystery and see what would happen. In time, the Holy Spirit, helped me

to learn this truth; we do not need to understand the Trinity to trust Triune love. Our desire to be in a relationship with God, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is not an intellectual exercise, it is a matter of the heart, not the head.

Many people who come to worship at Incarnation have questions about Episcopal traditions and beliefs. They may come from different faiths or from no faith tradition. However, there is something about our faith that resonates with them, and they want to know more. So even though what I am about to say may be well-known to lifelong Episcopalians I thought I would use the rest of this sermon to talk about what the Episcopal faith says about the Trinity and the Creeds. My sources are the Episcopal Church website and the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), specifically the section entitled, *An Outline of the Faith*, or Catechism that begins on page 845.

The Episcopal Church website says “We have two foundational Creeds that we use during worship: the Apostles’ Creed used at baptism and daily worship, and the Nicene Creed used at communion. In reciting and affirming these creeds, we join Christians across the world and throughout the ages in affirming our faith in the one God who created us, redeemed us, and sanctifies us.”¹

The Apostles’ Creed contains statements about our belief in God and who God is; belief in Jesus Christ and Jesus’ relationship to God; a short biography of Jesus’ life and his role in our lives; belief in the Holy Spirit and four gifts of grace: the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

The Nicene Creed also states our understanding of the Trinitarian nature of God; however, it says more about the life of Christ and who the Holy Spirit is. The Nicene Creed connects Baptism to the forgiveness of sins and affirms our belief in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Our collective recitation of The Nicene Creed binds us together as disciples who are in communion with one another.

The Catechism describes, in a question and answer format, our belief in God the Father, God the Son, and The Holy Spirit. These descriptions help us to understand the Trinitarian nature more fully. The Catechism says this about God the Father: “There is one God who created heaven and earth and all that is seen and unseen. The universe is good, and it is the work of a single loving God who creates and sustains, and directs it. The world belongs to the creator, and we are called to enjoy it and care for it in accordance with God’s purposes. All that God created includes human life and that means that all people are worthy of respect and honor because all are created in the image of God, and all can respond to the love of God.” (BCP, p. 846)

In its description of God the Son, the Catechism tells us that “Jesus is the only perfect image of the Father and shows us the nature of God. The nature of God in Jesus is love. By God’s own act, his divine Son received our human nature from the

¹ Source: <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/what-we-believe/creeds/>. Retrieved June 11, 2022

Virgin Mary, his mother. The divine Son became human so that in him human beings might be adopted as children of God and made heirs of God's kingdom.

By his resurrection, Jesus overcame death and opened for us the way of eternal life. Jesus went to the departed and offered them the benefits of redemption also. Jesus took our human nature into heaven when he ascended. He intercedes for us with the Father. We share in his victory when we are baptized into the New Covenant and become living members of Christ." (BCP, p.849-850)

The Holy Spirit, according to Catechism, "is the third person of the Trinity, God at work in the world and the Church even now. The Holy Spirit is the giver of life who spoke through the prophets. The Holy Spirit is revealed as the Lord who leads us into truth and enables us to grow in the likeness of Christ. We recognize the truths to be taught by the Holy Spirit when they are in accord with the Holy Scriptures". (BCP, p. 852-853)

There is more in the Catechism. However, I want to stop with these three descriptions because there are a few questions I want us to think about:

- If we believe that the world belongs to God, the creator and we are called to enjoy it and care for it in accordance with God's purposes, are we acting in harmony with God's purposes in the way we care for God's creation? What have we done and what have we left undone? How might we interact with God's creation in ways that are reverent and loving?
- If we believe that Jesus embodies both the love of God and human nature, what does it mean to be living members of Christ's body? How does believing in Jesus help us reconcile the call to love with our human natures?
- If we believe that the Holy Spirit is the source of truth that helps us to grow in the likeness of Christ, how does that truth shape our consciousness and our daily actions? How might we structure our lives so that we commune daily with the Spirit of Truth?

Questions lead to reflection, exploration, more reflection and more questions. To ponder spiritual truths, we need to take time to explore them. It is also helpful to be in conversation with other believers about what we are thinking and learning.

This fall we will have opportunities to explore the tenets of our faith through Christian education classes and bible study. We can use these opportunities to explore more deeply the truths of our faith and why we believe what we believe. Let us take this journey together as we seek to understand how God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, our unified source of love, redemption, and everlasting life, enhance our identity as Christ's own forever.