

“What the Trinity Means for You”
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Menifee United Church of Christ

A church needed money. So the minister said, “Today we’re going to take a second offering. Whoever gives the most money to this second offering will get to pick three hymns.” So the ushers passed around the plate and brought it up to the front to the pastor. The pastor was delighted to see on top of the plate a check for a thousand dollars. He recognized who it was from. It was from Gertrude, who sits way in the back of the church, an elderly lady. So the pastor invited Gertrude to come to the front of the church to be recognized and everybody applauded as she came forward. The pastor said to elderly Gertrude, “Now you get to pick three hymns.” Gertrude brightened and looked at the congregation and saw three handsome gentlemen and said, “I pick him, and him, and him.”

Do you know what today is? Today is Trinity Sunday. Three. Today Christians recognize that we are Trinitarians, that we believe in God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Now some detractors might say that that’s blasphemous, because you’re only supposed to worship one God. Christians would explain that that’s what we do. We worship one God, but in three parts. Like a play that has three acts. Or a book that has three chapters. Or a train that has three cars. Three in one. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity.

Now sometimes it’s difficult to understand the Trinity. And God. G.K. Chesterton was a great writer from about a hundred years ago or so. An Englishman. Converted to Catholicism. He said that our heads are too small and our brains are too feeble to account for God. To explain God.

But let’s try to explain God this morning, OK? When I was interviewed by your search committee about two years ago now, we sat around a round table in the chapel and Jim Wilson asked the last question. He came up and sat next to me and he said, “Do you believe in the Trinity?” I said, “Yes.” Then I added, “But I don’t think I can explain it.” They all said, “No, none of us can explain it either.” Let’s try to explain it this morning.

We see the Trinity in Scripture. In the book of Romans it speaks of the peace of Jesus. It speaks of the glory of God. And it speaks of love through the Holy Spirit.

That’s the Trinity in a nutshell, isn’t it? The glory of God, the peace of Jesus and the love of the Holy Spirit. We see the Trinity throughout the scripture, even though the word Trinity does not appear in Scripture. But it’s seen many times nonetheless.

And the Trinity needed Wisdom. According to Proverbs, God created Wisdom in the beginning. Wisdom was there when God laid out the foundation of the earth. When God decided the depths of the seas, Wisdom was there. Wisdom has always been with the Trinity.

The Trinity relies on Wisdom. God relied on Wisdom when God created the heavens and the earth, when God created the animals and the plants and the vegetables and us. Jesus relied on Wisdom when he took on the Sadducees and the Pharisees and outsmarted them. And the Holy Spirit relies on Wisdom. In whatever the Holy Spirit does, the Holy Spirit relies on Wisdom.

We see one of the members of the Trinity in the Word. According to the Gospel of John, “In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God and the Word was God.” And the Word brought life into the world. And light. And the light overcomes the darkness and the darkness could not overcome the light. And the Word was God’s Son.

Of course the Word was Jesus, right? Jesus is the light. Jesus is the life. We get life through Jesus according to the Gospel of John. Jesus takes us out of the darkness. Jesus is the light.

We see the Trinity throughout the Bible, as I said. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says, “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

It’s all right there, isn’t it? We’ve got the Great Commission: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, of all people. Help them to believe in God. And then it’s our baptismal words. A few weeks from now, when I baptize baby Francois, those are the words I’ll say, “I baptize you in the name of the Father. I baptize you in the name of the Son. And I baptize you in the name of the Holy Spirit.” It’s a demonstration of the Trinity. All of us who were baptized, were baptized into the Trinity. And by the way, if you weren’t baptized and you want to be, I’ll baptize you when I baptize Francois. We all were baptized into God, into Jesus, and into the Holy Spirit. Three in one. The Trinity.

We even might see the Trinity in the beginning. In the book of Genesis God says, "Let us make humankind in OUR image, according to OUR likeness." Now is God there using the royal "we," the editorial "we"? I don't think so.

Commentators say that God is referring to the divine council. But I wonder if God is referring to the Trinity – God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness." We are made in the image of God, we say. But I wonder if we aren't also made in the image of Jesus and in the image of the Holy Spirit, in addition to being made in the image of God. We are all children of God, we are all children of Jesus, we are all children of the Holy Spirit, it seems to me.

The Holy Spirit leads us. According to the Gospel of Matthew, after Jesus was baptized, by John the Baptist, he was led into the wilderness by the Spirit for forty days and forty nights where he was tempted by the devil.

Does the Spirit lead you the way the Spirit led Jesus? Does the Spirit direct your path? Has the Spirit led you, hopefully not to be tempted by the devil, but to lead a good life? Hopefully the Holy Spirit has led you to a good relationship. Hopefully the Holy Spirit has led you to the right career. Hopefully the Holy Spirit has led you to a bright future. The Holy Spirit leads us if we let the Holy Spirit do that. The way the Holy Spirit led Jesus. The Holy Spirit is, of course, one third of the Trinity.

Jesus saves us. I heard the story of a man who had a near death experience. He was a life long atheist and he had a near death experience. But he didn't go to heaven. He didn't see a light. He didn't see Jesus. He didn't see past family members. He didn't encounter Peter at the Pearly Gates. He says that he was going through a horrible place, seemingly to a horrible place. Hell perhaps. But then this lifelong atheist, either physically or in his mind, shouted, "Jesus!" And he says all of a sudden he did go to heaven. What happened there? He only went temporarily, it was a near death experience, it wasn't a complete death experience, so he came back to tell us about it. But he demonstrated that even for an atheist who has died, Jesus saved him.

Has Jesus saved you? Maybe not from a certain Hell, but maybe from hell on earth? Has Jesus saved you from a bad relationship, perhaps? Has Jesus saved you from an abusive relationship? Has Jesus saved you from an addiction, perhaps? To drugs or alcohol or gambling or whatever? Has Jesus saved you from a terrible experience like this atheist was having? I hope so. Jesus is, of course, one third of the Trinity.

God helps us. God helps us. A few months ago I was in church, and I prayed to God that God would help this church. Not two minutes later, a man walked into my office and said that he and some others wanted to start a Farmers Market and use our parking lot and that we could make twenty or thirty thousand dollars a year from it. Nothing to sneeze at. What was that? Was that coincidence, that I prayed and then this man walked in and said they want to start the Farmers Market? The Farmers Market has started, by the way. We've had three weeks of experience with the Farmers' Market and I believe we will make some money off of it, we will bring this community together on Friday mornings from 8:30 to 1:00. It will be a good thing. But was that coincidence? I don't believe in coincidence. I believe that was Providence. I believe that was God answering my prayer to help this church. Has God helped you? Has God answered your prayers in one way or another? Has God made your life better than it would be without God? God, of course, is one third of the Trinity.

What does the Trinity mean for you? Well, maybe you can look at it this way. You don't have just God lifting you up, you also have Jesus and the Holy Spirit lifting you up. You don't have just God helping you, you also have Jesus and the Holy Spirit helping you. You don't just have God supporting you, you also have Jesus and the Holy Spirit supporting you. Three in one. The Trinity. To put it another way, you know how people say, "Let go and let God"? Well, Christians, because we're Trinitarians, can also say, "Let go and let Jesus, and let go and let the Holy Spirit." We can let God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit help us. And when we do that, when we let go and let God, when we let go and let Jesus, when we let go and let the Holy Spirit, I believe our life is simply...divine.

Let us pray:

*God of love,
Help us to understand the Trinity.
Help us to know the Trinity.
And help us to experience the Trinity.
Now and forevermore,
By the power of the Holy Spirit,
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.*