

**June 7, 2009**  
**John 3:1-17**  
**Trinity Through Unity**

The liturgical church calendar calls this Sunday "Trinity Sunday" –  
(in most mainstream Protestant and Roman Catholic churches).

A day set aside to "celebrate" the unique triune character of our GOD:

(1) as a Loving Parent, (2) SON, as redeemer and (3) SPIRIT as sustainer.

The Trinity has always managed to leave scholars somewhat frustrated and the faithful somewhat confused. Trying adequately to express the mystery of a God who is Three-in-One tends to leave us tongue-tied.

Symbols for the Trinity include a circle inscribed within an equilateral triangle.

Actually, during the first eight centuries of Christian art, the image of the triangle for the Trinity was not widespread -- although on one of the gravestones in the catacombs there is a triangle in which the monogram of the name of Christ was placed.

The trinity was often represented in art, but they were shown separately. The first time they seem to have been placed together was in the fourth century, and that representation consisted of "the Hand, the Lamb and the Dove," which seems to no longer to exist.

Any person of Irish descent (North or South) has knowledge of St. Patrick's cloverleaf image of the Trinity -- three leaves making up one clover leaf -- there is always room for some new imagery as well.

My favorite model of the Trinity is that it is like a child's pigtail.

If the Trinity is seen as a plait -- three equal strands smoothly interrelated -- there are some advantages.

First, you can tear one of the leaves off a clover threesome and leave the other two still related, but if you pull one of the strands out of a plait, the whole thing collapses.

If we believe in a Trinitarian God, this threefold revelation makes perfect sense, and obviously the same thing applies: You cannot have any two of the sources without the third because the whole thing falls apart.

At times, when plaiting, it is important to look at the whole pigtail and check that the hair has been reasonably accurately divided into three.

Both the orthodox churches of the East and the charismatic movement throughout the U.S. have suggested that perhaps the mainstream churches of the West have become excessively Christocentric –

that their emphasis on the second person of the Trinity (Christ) has made the pigtail somewhat lopsided.

In the same way, I would suggest that perhaps we have allowed the strand of creation to get rather too skinny; that God's role as Creator and sustainer of the universe needs some fleshing out, some extra weight.

For many of us, however, words will always fail to capture the truth of the Trinity. A lucky few may have other, more dramatic ways in which they are capable of capturing the essential qualities of a Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Here is another attempt at understanding the Trinity that you might wish to use.

Believe it or not children use to play with mercury in school!

Do you remember?

The grade school science sections had teachers passing out small amounts of mercury to study.

(Of course, now we know it is poisonous.)

Mercury is an unusual metal because it remains in liquid form at room temperature. This makes it both highly useful and potentially quite dangerous.

In elementary school there was a period of time when some of us started bringing small pill bottles to school with a few drops of liquid mercury swimming around in the bottom.

During the duller parts of class, we would empty the contents of our bottles into the little craters on the desks that were designed to hold pencils.

While the teacher droned on, we amused ourselves by taking the points of our pencils and dividing the large, single mercury bead into dozens of tiny little balls that shimmered and skittered on the desktop.

Most amazing of all was that simply by rolling the small drops back to touch each other, they were all reabsorbed back to re-create the one large, silver ball.

The liquid mercury existed both as those separate beads and as that unified mass. When considered as one, it was seamless and whole, perfectly round and stable.

But it also existed as those separate identities,

themselves completely independent and with their own character.

Might this give us some hint into the workings of the triune God? God is whole, fully formed and diamond-perfect; not some piecemeal work that is stuck together with divine duct tape.

But as a Trinitarian reality -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit -- the divine is also known in seamless separateness.

Not lopped-off parts that look incomplete, but individual beads of divinity that shimmer with their own purpose and power. Yet the whole is recalled at a touch, the three wholly part of the one.

In today's lesson Jesus counseled Nicodemus that if he really wanted to experience the kingdom of God, he himself would have to undergo a change of community and identity. He would need to be born -- both "from above" and "anew."

As a resident of this kingdom of God -- as a re-created individual, Nicodemus was told he would be introduced to the wind of the Spirit and the sacrifice of Christ. .

Faced with all these fresh categories of divine activity, little wonder poor Nicodemus could only stammer, "How can these things be?"

"How can this be?" is the great question throughout history when one is faced with the mystery of the Trinity -- Three-in-One and One-in-Three.

In the long run, perhaps the only way we can ever hope to understand the triune nature of God is for us to be more truly the church.

The Trinity reveals that relationships stand at the heart of the universe. Atoms do not exist unless they are in relationship with other atoms.

You and I do not exist unless in relationships with others. Even God exists in relationship. The human soul is not within. The human soul is not without. The human soul is between.

This means that we exist personally, communally and socially in relationship with others. Our identity is as the body of Christ in relationships with this world. The measure of our faithfulness is found in our relationships with others.

It is in relationships that we can perhaps begin to incarnate the character of Father, Son and Holy Spirit into our lives as disciples.

How do we relate to others so that all aspects of the Divine are glorified? How do we look for our mission, our future? As your Pastor let me suggest three directions, each of which seems to reflect one aspect of the Trinity.

1) To incarnate God the Creator: Work with what is at hand. What has the Creator God given you that is all around you? There is no perfect job. Find purpose and delight in the small things.

2) To incarnate God the Redeemer: Work with your pain; work through your pain; give your pain a purpose; and work with others in pain. Recognize where you have been so that you will know where others have been. Like Christ, you bear wounds where you have been broken.

3) To incarnate God the Holy Spirit: Work with your passion -- what do you care about? What makes your heart sing? What gets you outside yourself and into the world?

Can you answer any of those questions?

What do you really care about?

Do you find Franklin Church is helping you to achieve your goals?

If not, why not. Tell me and the rest of our church leadership what we can do to help your heart sing! Are you willing to make the effort to get yourself out in mission and ministry to others?

I do not care so much about people's personal doctrinal beliefs.

I care more about doing, than doctrine.

Remember that most of our nation's founding fathers were Deists, Unitarians. This included Washington, Jefferson and Franklin.

A Unitarian, a Deist, a Jew or Muslims actions speak louder than words.

Last Tuesday a Long Island convenience store owner was robbed by a baseball –bat wielding robber.

The store owner Mohammad Sohail, a Muslim who moved to the U.S. from Pakistan, pulled out a rifle and got the robber to drop his bat.

The assailant not only dropped his bat, but dropped to his knees; starting crying and begged the Muslim store owner's forgiveness.

The robber in tears said that he recently lost his job and was just trying to feed his family. So Mohammad Sohail made the man promise he would never commit a robbery again, and then gave the man \$40 in cash and a loaf of bread.

Police detectives reviewing the surveillance video were stunned.

But I believe actions do speak louder than words.

Now let us go and serve God and our neighbor in all that we do.

Amen!

