

All in One
Trinity Weekend
Romans 5:1-5
May 30, 2021
Pastor Jenothy Irvine

Prayer: Dear God, show us who you are. Jesus, reveal the way of peace. Holy Spirit, illuminate the truth that holds it all together and the presence that invites us to the table of the three we call One.

Message -

Holding a baby as it takes its first few breaths. Holding the hand of someone as they take their last breath. These are moments that leave you speechless. Watching the sunrise while standing on a 13,000 foot mountain. Watching the sunset over the ocean as the tide carries your worry away. These are moments that leave you silent and in awe. When was the last time you saw something so beautiful you couldn't find the words to adequately describe it? Or, heard a sound, a song, a melody, so incredible you stood speechless? We have all at times experienced the limitations of words when trying to describe those transformative moments. It's like trying to explain the unexplainable.

Today I will do just that; attempt to explain the unexplainable. I will do so with the help of this - Andrei Rublev's "The Trinity."

Lastweek's Pentecost service set us up perfectly to now take on Trinity weekend. This is the weekend in the church calendar when we recognize, celebrate, and attempt to comprehend the vastness of one God revealed in three parts.

- We sing about it. "God in three persons, blessed trinity."
- We read about it. "God did not send God's son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." Jn. 3:17 "My Father goes on working, and so do I." Jn. 5:17 "The Holy Spirit...will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." Jn 14:26
- We hear the occasional sermon or bible lesson about it.
- We sometimes even feel it - saying, "I had a feeling I should call."

But do we understand the power and presence of what has been described as the "central, foundational doctrine of our entire Christian belief system" (Rohr 25)?

- When you were young, the Trinity may have been presented in one of these ways:
 - The trinity is like an apple (picture).
 - The trinity is like an egg - each part the whole. (picture).
 - The trinity is like a clover - each leaf representing a part of the whole. (picture).

Now, there is nothing inherently wrong with these illustrations but do they capture the fullness, intimacy, and capacity of the divine relationship we call the trinity? When asked what God is like, preschool students see

these and tell me, “God is crunchy,” “sometimes red or green,” or “gooey.” Not sure that is the kind of fullness we are talking about.

There is indeed a holy mystery surrounding the Trinity. Therefore, as we begin, I want to ask you to remember something. “Remember that mystery isn’t something that you cannot understand - it is something that you can endlessly understand! There is no point at which you can say, ‘I’ve got it.’ Rather, mystery always and forever, gets you” (Rohr 27). What I mean is, we can say, “it is like...its’ similar to...” but we can never say “it is” because we are in the realm of the beyond, of transcendence, of mystery. That is where the Trinity resides and only when our human reality brushes up against the holy, do we catch glimpses of such wonder, power, and mystery.

That brings us back to this. Show picture of Andrei Rublev’s *The Trinity*.

This is a famous painting created in the fifteenth century by Russian artist Andrei Rublev and has become “the icon of icons” for many in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions. It is said to be based on the biblical account in Genesis chapter eighteen, in which three visitors came to Abraham and Sarah. Abraham called to his servants and Sarah and they prepared a meal for the guests. It was during that meal, the visitors told Abraham and Sarah they would have a son even though they were along in years and Sarah was considered barren. Upon that story and the powerful encounter, Reblev depicted the holy guests sharing a meal together.

So powerful is this painting that a story is told that one artist became a flower of Jesus just from gazing at this icon, exclaiming, “If that’s the nature of God, then I’m a believer” (Rohr 29). The original is still on display in the Tretyakov (Tret-ya-kov) gallery in Moscow.

The invitation for you, for all of us today, is to allow this painting to teach, inspire, and broaden our understanding of the trinity. It is my prayer that all of us will expand our awareness of the role, significance, and power of the Trinity.

We do not have time to dissect, analyze, and compare all the parts and pieces and parts, signs and symbols, angles, brush strokes, positioning, and tone and voice of this piece but I do want to concentrate on a few things. First, the color of the robes the divine guests are wearing. Rublev considered gold the color of God, indicating perfection, fullness, wholeness, and the ultimate source.

He considered blue the color of “the Human ” - thinking about how both sea and sky mirror one another. Therefore God in Christ taking on the world, taking on humanity. Thus, Rublev pictures Christ as blue. Christ reflecting or mirroring God. Notice the Christ figure displaying his two fingers to tell us that he has put spirit and matter together as one; he is the reflection of both; divinity and humanity, together within himself.

Then there is green, representative of “the Spirit.” Hildegard called the Spirit “a quality of divine aliveness that makes everything blossom and bloom in endless shades of green.” Rublev, three centuries *after* Hildegard, represents this same concept with the color green; “the divine

photosynthesis that grows everything from within by transforming light into itself - precisely the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy One expressed in three - each revealing a unique aspect and quality of the whole; each interdependent on the other; eating and drinking, in infinite hospitality and mutual indwelling; both separate but one, sharing the deepest connection between themselves in true communion and community. (Rohr 30).

Like with any powerful piece of art, the more you look at this piece, the more you can see; the more it “speaks” to you of its mystery. Every part of it was obviously meditated on with great care: the gaze between the Three, the deep respect between them as they all share from a common bowl. Note the hand of the Spirit pointing toward the open and fourth place at the table. Why would Rblev include this action? What does it mean? Is the Holy Spirit inviting, offering, or clearing a space and if so, for what? For who?

Perhaps the words penned by Paul in the book of Romans 5:1-5 will provide our answer.

Read Text

The answer is you - us - you’ins, all y’all, anyone and everyone.

The power of the Trinity is found in its relationship to itself first and to us second. Without understanding or at least acknowledging the depth of love and communion in the relationship between God, Jesus, and the Holy

Spirit, we cannot come to understand or acknowledge what our relationship with them is nor what our relationship one to another is to look like.

Without the trinity we cannot understand true community. We do not grasp the depth of love, service or sacrifice without the trinity.

That was the mystery within invitation to Abraham and Sarah - to be a part of God's bigger plan and that is (at least in part - as much as I can articulate) the mystery of our participation with God, with Jesus, and with the Holy Spirit - All in one. We are invited to sit at the very table with the Three in One. We - the collective we are the fourth presence at the table! (wrap your head around that!).

Don't take my word for it, take the word of professional art historians who have suggested that there appears to be a little rectangular hole painted on the front of the table. Most miss it but some say that the remaining glue on the original icon indicates that there was perhaps a mirror glued to the front of the table (30). Whether on the original or added later, imagine the powerful message that gives to onlookers. The message that there is room at the table for a fourth; for another; for the other - the observer, you (31) there is room. There is room for the empty and the full, the broken and the whole, the joyful and the grieving. There is room.

The words of Romans 5 are considered to be one of Paul's great lyrical passages in which he reflects on his life, ministry, and calling to teach and preach the love of Jesus. You can almost hear him sing of the intimate joy of his confidence in God as only one who had been through a great deal could. Such joy and confidence in God didn't come easy. It

didn't come quickly. Yet it is a song of trusting that faith has done what no amount of work or laboring over the law, rules, and rituals could ever do - faith has given believers access to God. Faith has given believers peace with Jesus. Faith has given believers life with the Holy Spirit. All in one.

I find it interesting that Paul wrote these words toward the end of his ministry. Perhaps at a time when he came to a deeper understanding and a more mature faith; a time when he could step back and reflect on his life as if looking at a painting, and he discovered what it truly means to be in the presence of all things holy - God, the All in One.

The question for us then, is this: What does it mean for you to know that God, the all in one, invites you to participate with them in all things good, beautiful, and true? What ramifications does it have on your life to know that at any given time and in any given situation or circumstance, there stands with you, God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, all in one? How might your life be changed, your interactions different, your decision making challenged, your relationships transformed, knowing that all of God, represented in all of Jesus, is given to us by all of the Holy Spirit? All in one.

Dear People of God, if that doesn't leave you speechless and standing in awe, I don't know what will. Amen.

Resources Consulted

William Barclay, *Daily Bible Series*

Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*.