

Welcome

Hymn #277 Holy, Holy, Holy

<https://www.godtube.com/popular-hymns/holy-holy-holy-lord-god-almighty/>

Matthew 28:16-20

The Commissioning of the Disciples

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Let us pray! “Almighty God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O’ Lord our strength and our Redeemer.” Amen.

“Trinity”

Today we are celebrating Trinity Sunday. Trinity Sunday teaches us about the mystical unity of the hypostasis, of the one Triune God. What does all this gobbledy-gook mean? (*Just for clarity the hypostasis is just a big word for the three persons of God.*)

What do we really understand about the Trinity? What do we really know for sure? Who are the persons of the Trinity? Some people call the three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, others: Creator, Christ, and Spirit.

But does giving a name to something confer understanding? Adam named all the animals yet we still do not understand the mysteries of DNA and the structure of biological systems. *Even with a new name we do not comprehend the threefold structure of being.* And so, no one really understands the doctrine of the Trinity in the gut.

We have knowledge in the head but the Divine Intelligence inherent in our being has yet to drop down from the head into the heart.

What does it mean to say there is One God, but three persons? Who can understand the Unity and differentiation of the Infinite Invisible? Who can comprehend One God with three different aspects?

There are many ways to attempt an explanation with the head. We belong to a Trinitarian Christian Church. The UCC doctrine and historical affirmation of faith is Trinitarian. So its important for us to struggle a little with these concepts.

Let's jump right in the middle of it. We are Christians. We affirm the existence of God in many forms, and we pray to God. However, we all imagine God a little differently because of our conditioning. *We have different "wedding garments."*

We feel a little closer to one or another aspect of God because of our relation to our care givers. If we had a stern father our God image is stern. If we had an absent father, our God is no where to be found. Similarity, if we had a loving mother, the God image corresponds.

How we are socialized affects our God image; it affects how we relate to the Divine. But it isn't an indication of who God really is. This conditioning is a glass we look through dimly. It affects how we perceive God but not the reality of God as it "Is". Without further delay, let's get into the persons or images of God we have.

Some people pray more often to God the Father or God the Creator. God the Father or God the Creator is what we call the first person of the Trinity.

Others are more Christ centric in their belief. The United Church of Christ as a denomination is one of those churches that focuses on Christ's life and teaching here on earth and how that affects our lives today. Following in the footsteps of Jesus, the incarnate God, also encourages us to help the weak and the poor, and to work for justice and peace in the world.

We UCC-ers have our own Incarnation Theology written by the Mercersburg church fathers, Phillip Schaff and John Nevin. Our branch of the church Universal has a rich local history. Right here, in Lancaster, PA, at Franklin and Marshall College, the founding clergy of our church affirmed that Jesus is important to Christianity. As a result, we believe that Jesus and the Incarnation are the foundation of our theology. Jesus Christ is the second person of the Trinity.

Then there are some people and whole denominations that focus on the Holy Spirit. The Spirit moves in mysterious ways. Pentecostal worship affirms Spirit with songs and praise. A Pentecostal worship service expresses the unity of God through enthusiasm, speaking in tongues, and the outburst of emotional affect. The Holy Spirit inspires many forms of worship and reminds us of the diversity of God's love. The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity.

We, human beings are far from understanding the mystery of God. The formal dogma, or teaching of the Trinity, gives even the most accomplished theologians plenty to ponder. Actually, the word Trinity does not appear in the Bible. In the 3rd century, the Latin theologian, Tertullian, was the first who used the word "Trinity" to explain that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are "one in essence — not one in Person."¹

I know it's Trinity Sunday, but I still have to say something about our gospel reading. In our gospel reading, the disciples have already been told by the women that Jesus would meet them later. They were told to gather in Galilee. Some of the disciples doubt the women's testimony, but the eleven go to the mountain anyway.

When Jesus appears they are amazed. Jesus gives them his blessing and sends them out into the world to make disciples in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Even though the word Trinity does not appear in the Bible, we can find the three persons of the Trinity together in many texts. Listen to verse 19 again:

“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...”

This verse was one of the most important Bible messages that helped me decide to become an ordained minister. I felt that Jesus was sending me out to bring all God's little children to him. This scripture gave me the strength to push through during the difficult times in seminary and in challenging situations in applied ministry. I love this text, for it has helped me through St. John's of the Cross's "Dark Night of the Soul".² Today I feel blessed to be a disciple called to preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity> 5/20/2016.

2 <https://makeheaven.com/st-john-of-the-cross.html>

I feel called to baptize your babies and give you communion. I feel called to serve God with all my heart, mind, and soul. I am blessed that I can do what I love to do.

But let's examine this idea a little closer. Let's examine the heart, mind, and soul of the matter. One can imagine the three persons of God also as parts of a body. We can say that the Trinity is the heart, mind, and soul of God. God the Father is the head, and therefore, the Mind of God, while the Son, the Incarnating principle, is the heart, and the Spirit is the soul of God.

These are just concepts. The reality is much more simple, and certainly the realization of God obliterates all these concepts. But for the sake of rudimentary understanding we can use these limited concepts to talk about something that is "Holy Other".³

But this text is not about my interesting analogies. Learning about the Trinity is not easy. Our minds cannot comprehend how three different things are one at the same time. However, if you think about how the water can be solid, liquid, and vapor that may help you imagine how the one God works through three different persons. But even this is reductionistic. It cannot account for the non rational expression of God.

If you are still a little worried about your faith and understanding of the Trinity, listen to what the great theologian, Augustine, told his students who were studying the doctrine of the Trinity:

"Lest you become discouraged, know that when you love, you know more about who God is, than you could ever know with your intellect."⁴

Even if we cannot fully comprehend the doctrine of the Trinity, *but we love God with our whole heart*, we are following Jesus. Also, when we love others generously, that love is God made manifest. God is love. The Holy Spirit works in our souls and inspires us to do God's will. And what is God's will for us? It is to love...Could it be that simple?

3 Otto, Rudolph. The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry Into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Holy. 1923.

https://archive.org/stream/theideaoftheholyy00ottouoft/theideaoftheholyy00ottouoft_djvu.txt

4 What Kind of Math Is This? by The Right Rev. Dean Wolfe, on John 16:12-15 for Trinity Sunday - Year C, May 26, 2013.

The Holy Spirit is here right now, to inspire us to relax and even have a laugh once and awhile. So let's listen to an old theological joke:

About five centuries ago, the Pope decided that all the Jews had to leave the Vatican. It was the Spanish Diaspora. Naturally there was a big uproar from the Jewish community. So the Pope made a deal. The Pope would debate their best Rabbi. If the Rabbi won, they could stay. If the Pope won, the Jews would have to leave.

The Jews picked a middle aged Rabbi named Moishe. Moishe asked for one addition to the debate. To make it more interesting, neither side would be allowed to talk. The Pope agreed.

The day of the great debate came. Moishe and the Pope sat in silence for a whole minute before the Pope raised his hand and showed three fingers. Moishe looked back at him and raised one finger. The Pope waved his fingers in a circle around his head. Moishe pointed to the ground where he sat. The Pope pulled out a wafer and a glass of wine. Moishe pulled out an apple. The Pope stood up and said, "I give up. This man is too good. The Jews can stay."

An hour later, the cardinals were all around the Pope asking him what happened. The Pope said, "First I held up three fingers to represent the Trinity. He responded by holding up one finger to remind me that there was still one God. Then I waved my finger around to show him that God was all around us. He responded by pointing to the ground and showing that God was also right here with us. I pulled out the wine and the wafer to show that God absolves us from our sins. He pulled out an apple to remind me of original sin. He had an answer for everything. What could I do?"

Meanwhile, the Jewish community had crowded around Moishe.

"What happened?" they asked.

"Well," said Moishe, "First he said to me that the Jews had three days to get out of here. I told him that not one of us was leaving. Then he told me that this whole city would be cleared of Jews. I let him know that we were staying right here."

"And then?" asked a woman.

"I don't know," said Moishe. "He took out his lunch and I took out mine."...

Understanding the Trinity is important, but it's not vital. Loving God and our neighbor is vital. The world can exist without our concepts of it. But we

cannot exist, without love. God is love. When we talk about love, we must talk about the people we love the most; for many of us that is our church, our families, and our children.

Shiloh UCC is so proud of our children who have become adults. Our whole church is proud today of our graduating students, who are working hard to become happy, productive, citizens of the world. Job well done, good and faithful servants! Today, we lift up the saints of God who worship right here in Shiloh. Job well done Benjamin Metzger, and Jackson and Madison Miller. Congratulations to our graduates!

But now let's get back to the Trinity. Understanding the Trinity is nice, but it's not a prerequisite to a joy filled life. You don't have to be a theologian to love and forgive your neighbor. You don't have to be a genius to be kind and generous. Sometimes, the smartest people have the most difficulty with faith. Sometimes, us scholars get big egos and we overthink simple matters and then we become proud of how smart we are.

The Trinity is not simply about understanding. The Trinity is about mysticism, holy dance, and above all, sacred love. If you want to know more about the Trinity, let the Holy Spirit work in your heart, and allow God to transform you.

We all need the transforming power of God's love. We all need to treat others kindly and respectfully. We all need to grow spiritually. I think the secret to a joy filled life is not knowing more and perfectly understanding the doctrine of the Trinity.

The secret to a joyful life is to fear the Lord, and to love the creation and all creatures humbly. God is the energy that allows this love to occur. But all this is beyond our capacity to know. We must "Be" the love we seek to spread. Let's be. Let's be love. Let's respect the Lord, and love humbly, for this is the beginning of all wisdom. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Three in One, Holy Trinity, we cannot understand you. Holy God, all we know is that you love us. You created a beautiful universe. You sent your Son, Jesus Christ to live and love among us. You sent your Holy Spirit to comfort us on our journey. We cannot understand you, but we don't have to. It's enough to know that you are with us. You walk with us every step of the journey. You lift us up when we fall and forgive us when we sin.

Today we thank you for all your blessings. We especially thank you for our talented and smart young people who graduate this year. Bless them and guide them on their road to adulthood. Help them be your faithful disciples in a world of uncertainty and struggle.

Comfort us right now with your Holy Spirit. Send your presence into our lives and make us good stewards of your vast creation. Empower us to be disciples who spread your joy to the four corners of the earth. Holy, Holy, Holy God, send us out into the world to gather your lost sheep. Let us bring them back home to you that they may feel your comfort also.

Jesus, healer of souls, we pray now for all the people on our prayer list. We pray that you would heal your servants' bodies and souls, so that they can serve you with joy.

And now join me in praying the words Jesus taught the disciples saying: Our Father...

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

INVITATION

One: Jesus Christ said: I am the bread of life. You who come to me shall not hunger; you who believe in me shall never thirst.

All: In company with all who hunger for spiritual food, we come to this table to know the risen Christ in the sharing of this life-giving bread.

One: This table is for all Christians who wish to know the presence of Christ and to share in the community of God's people.

CONFESSION OF SIN

One: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

All: But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

One: Therefore, let us confess our sins before God and one another.

All: Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and follow your ways, to the glory of your name. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

One: Anyone in Christ becomes a new person altogether; the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new. Friends, believe the good news of the gospel:

All: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

Let us pray. Eternal God, who has created the heavens and the earth, giving breath to every living thing, we thank you for all the gifts of creation and for the gift of life itself. We thank you for making us in your own image, for forgiving us and keeping us in your steadfast care. We praise you for Christ's life, death and resurrection, and in the beloved community of your church, we await Christ's return at the end of history. Amen.

On the night when Jesus was betrayed, he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said,

"This is my body, which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, after supper he took the cup saying,

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

These are the gifts of God for the people of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your hearts by faith, with thanksgiving.

Eat this, for it is the body of Christ, broken for you.

Drink this, for it is the blood of Christ, shed for you.

UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Bountiful God, we give you thanks that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us the presence of Christ. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth into the world in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn

Spirit Song

Benediction

Thank you for listening. Have a blessed Trinity Sunday!