

June 15, 2025

Trinity Sunday

Matthew 28:16–20

“Why do we have the Trinity?”

1. Sometimes words aren't enough to express a complex idea.
 - a. You may have heard that “a picture is worth a thousand words”
 - i. I happen to think a story is worth a thousand pictures.
 - ii. And some may say a song is worth a thousand stories
 - b. It makes sense that it would be difficult at times to express emotions or ideas with just one way of communicating
 - i. It's hard to describe a delicious flavor with words, or a passionate kiss with a painting, or despair with a piece of music
 - ii. Not that we don't try, of course
 - iii. We attempt with our limited vocabulary to explain and describe life
 - c. I recently heard that the singer, songwriter Pharrell Williams not only hears musical sounds but they each also come to him as color
 - i. That's right: he hears in COLOR <https://enna.org/pharrel-williams-and-his-experience-with-synesthesias>
 - ii. He is the guy who wrote the song “Happy” from the soundtrack of the second Despicable Me movie. I'll link the song in our Facebook page.
 - iii. An article says “To appreciate Pharrell's experience, it's important to understand synesthesia—a condition where stimulating one sense involuntarily triggers another. For people with synesthesia, experiences like listening to music, reading, or tasting food can activate a second sensory pathway, creating vibrant cross sensory perceptions. For Pharrell, music doesn't just produce sound; it creates vivid, colourful images in his mind—a form known as chromesthesia (sound to colour synesthesia).”
 - iv. In the documentary “ ‘Piece by Piece,’ Pharrell offers a window into what it's like to live with synesthesia and how it profoundly shapes his music. He sees colours, shapes, and textures when he listens to sounds, translating this colourful landscape into melodies that are as visually inspired as they are aurally catchy. For Pharrell, crafting a song isn't just about how it sounds; it's about how it looks and feels in his mind's eye.”
 - d. What that means to me is that for him his compositions explore not just sounds but also visual displays in his mind
 - i. Maybe his compositions are about both music and color
 - ii. But you and I are really only perceiving at one level, at the sound level
 - iii. There may be an absolutely magnificent color display happening, like a display of fireworks on a Fourth of July
 - iv. But since the only shared language we have is the music, that's all we get
 - v. I have heard Pharrell Williams interviewed, and he describes some of the colors he sees, but it feels insufficient, and you get jealous he sees all that

2. It should come as no surprise that when trying to describe, let alone understand, God, just using words isn't going to be enough
 - a. To understand God, to grasp God's spiritual nature, it is like for you and me to try to hear in color, like Pharrell Williams does.
 - i. The best we can do is imagine it. but we can't quite get the full effect
 - ii. The spiritual world, and the state or dimension which God inhabits is the stuff of speculation, dreams, and yes, faith.
 - b. Of course it's an exercise in faith
 - i. There have been philosophers and many others who have argued we are fooling ourselves in trying to describe God
 - ii. Nothing we can do can prove God exists, and so describing God would be madness according to them
 - iii. Incidentally, nothing they can do can disprove God exists.
 - c. So as people of faith maybe we feel something which others do not, which may give us some connection to that Divine Life Force and then we attempt to describe it
 - d. But, as I say to folks, in theology once you get started explaining something, you'll eventually end up in a corner, no matter what you do.
 - i. What I mean is that by the very nature of trying to describe something which is basically indescribable, we can't fully capture it, and we end up finding the limitations of our understanding
 - ii. But still we try, and hope we'll be OK with the corner we paint ourselves into.
 - iii. Here is an example of trying to describe God as we perceive in faith: God is loving and forgiving.
 1. Sounds good, right?
 2. But if we follow with logic to try to define that better, we will eventually end up in one of several possible corners
 - a. So then it doesn't matter if I'm good?
 - b. So then there is no hell?
 - c. So then why did God kill people in the flood?
 3. You get the idea
3. So, for centuries one of the theological corners the church has decided to paint itself into is this notion of the Trinity, which today on Trinity Sunday we reflect on
 - a. Basically, the concept of the Trinity is that God is one, and at that, the one true God,
 - i. but through faith and revelation we have come to understand that there are specific aspects or shapes of God's divinity which we have tried to name as Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
 - ii. but naming them doesn't mean God is three gods, but rather God has a complexity we can barely grasp
 - b. Other cultures which existed during the time described in the Bible worshiped more than one god.
 - i. They had the god of this and the god of that.
 - ii. To them this notion of One God seemed foolish
 - iii. But to our ancestors in the faith, they had come to understand revelation from God as describing the one and only God of the Bible.

- iv. And so Moses had spiritual encounters, and Jacob had dreams, and all these gave a glimpse into the spiritual (hearing with color, you might say)
 - v. And so we formed an idea of God – not that we understood God fully!
 - c. But then when Jesus came, we began to understand an expansion of who God is
 - i. We came up with human words that were insufficient to describe Jesus in relation to God
 - 1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us
 - 2. Jesus is the Son of God, Emmanuel – God with us
 - 3. Jesus is the resurrection and the Life
 - ii. The picture of God was getting complicated with this new revelation of Jesus
 - 1. And we have struggled to explain the relationship and differences and unity of them
 - d. And then Jesus talked about the Holy Spirit
 - i. He described the Spirit as the comforter and advocate
 - ii. The Bible speaks of her as Sophia, Wisdom
 - iii. Her name means Breath of God
 - e. And so we find ourselves in a corner, trying to describe the richness of God, and the unbelievable love and power, and we twist ourselves into a knot
 - i. Arguing we don't have three Gods
 - ii. Trying to make sense of why and how Jesus ended up suffering
 - iii. Trying hard not to “pick a favorite” part of the Trinity and focusing only on it.
4. The Trinity is a mystery of faith as old as time. I'm not about to solve it on a short sermon in the English language of the 21st Century.
 - a. And yet what I can say is that by faith we get glimpses which reveal more of God
 - b. Think of how you perceived your parents when you were 8, or 18, or 48
 - c. You had a distinct and helpful vantage point at each of those ages
 - d. And I'm not going to say that you understood better as time went on, but your appreciation and ability to put yourselves in their shoes evolved with time
 - e. A parent went from hero, to maker-of-rules, to carrier-of-wisdom
 - f. A teacher went from expert, to mentor, to colleague
 - g. A parent and a teacher are dynamic, not static, and they can interact with us in a number of ways
 - h. Likewise God interacts with us in a variety of ways, and when and how we encounter God, we may come to new wisdom, new words, new concepts to try to describe the very same God who created us and has loved us since the beginning
 - i. And honestly, I don't know why it stopped at the Trinity. Maybe because we have three dimensions and we can't easily conceive of more
 - j. I would like to be open to revelation about a Trinity Plus, a description of what is difficult to imagine about an indescribable Deity.
5. Maybe the Trinity is the color of grace, the taste of faith, the smell of hope. May we come to experience that and more.