
Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 26 May 2024 Trinity Sunday

Isaiah 6:1-8 • Romans 8:12-17 • John 3:1-17



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Today is Trinity Sunday, when we celebrate our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is a great mystery, and on this day we try to understand it a bit better. It has always been a challenging subject, and many books have been filled with explanations and commentary about it, and many, many sermons have been preached on it.

The essence of the Trinity is that we worship one God, but God exists in three persons — that is the theological term — which are God, Jesus and Holy Spirit. God is all three at once, all the time. But God may choose to act in ways which might surprise us, such as when one person, Jesus Christ, was born to Mary and became a human being. God's act of creating the earth was through Jesus, as John says in his Gospel: "Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him" (John 1:3). And we recall from Genesis that before the land and animals were created, "The raging ocean that covered

everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the Spirit of God was moving over the water” (Genesis 1:2). God, Son and Spirit were all present from the very beginning.

The concept of the Trinity leads us inevitably to baptism, for baptism is the essential act which makes us children of God. I do not mean my act of baptism as a priest, when I splash a bit of water on the forehead of a child, or adult candidate. That is merely an outward sign. The actual baptism is an act of God, in which God graciously grants to us the status of being God’s sons and daughters. In doing so, God’s Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, inhabits us, becomes part of us. The Spirit is a gift from God and Jesus Christ, as we say in our Nicene Creed. So all three persons of the Trinity are involved in our baptism: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This is one way of looking at the Trinity: God grants us the Spirit, which continues the work that Jesus started, in guiding us into the ways of righteousness — that is, the ways of God, and how God wants us to live in the world God created. All three are God, and in grace, blessings flow to us, as we seek to live as we are inspired to do.

I think I’ve told you all before about the storm at sea I once encountered, when my family and I were sailing a few hundred kilometres east of here, and were caught in a near-hurricane. The waves were at least 10 metres high, and the wind was howling at nearly 100 ks. Where was God in this? Was God in the waves? Was God in the winds? Yes, for God is in all things. Was God trying to destroy our little boat? No, for if that’s what God wanted, I wouldn’t be here. God accomplishes his purposes. Where was the Holy Spirit? Perhaps moving over the face of the waters, as we are told in Genesis — very troubled waters, in this case. I had not yet given my life to God, so the Holy Spirit was not in me. But we all have our own spirit (with a small s), which is given us when we are born — our own breath which animates our bodies — that which makes the difference between a living person and a dead one. What I wonder is — did the Holy Spirit speak to my spirit and guide me to do the right things in order to survive the storm?

Paul speaks of two spirits in our reading from the Letter to the Romans today:

... the Spirit makes you God's children, and by the Spirit's power we cry out to God, “Father! my Father!” ¹⁶ God's Spirit joins himself to our spirits to declare that we are God's children. (Romans 8:15-16)

“God’s Spirit [the Holy Spirit] joins himself to our spirits to declare that we are God’s children.” It is a meeting of Spirits which takes place when we are baptised; that is, when we are born again. How extraordinary! It seems that God puts a placeholder in us when we are born, a space, a hole in which to

deposit the Holy Spirit when we choose to give ourselves to Christ. Again, the work of the Trinity: God, Jesus and Spirit.

In our baptism, we are reborn, and receive the Holy Spirit. Nicodemus is surprised when Jesus tells him about being born again, although the idea of a spiritual rebirth is not entirely foreign to Jewish theology. Ezekiel spoke of this when he told Israel to "Rid yourselves of all the offences you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit" (Ezek 18:31). But Jesus says specifically we must be born of water and the Spirit. It is tempting to see his mention of water as a reference to the literal waters of baptism, yet I believe that Jesus is referring more to the cleansing and renewing image of water. Water cleans away the soiling and impurities, just as God, if we repent, cleans away our old sins. Baptism is the work of the Spirit, which inhabits our bodies, as God cleans and prepares us for our new souls. God creates a new thing in us when we are reborn.

God is Trinity — the Trinity is God. Through the enabling of the Spirit, let us give thanks, through Christ, to our loving and gracious God. Amen.