

Holy Trinity B 2018
May 27, 2018 :: All Lections
Fr. Jim Cook

“God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity.”

Today is the feast day of the Holy Trinity. This is the day we focus on and celebrate the “fact” that our one God exists as three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

But it might be more accurate to say that today is the feast day of the *doctrine* of the Holy Trinity; that is, our celebration of our *explanation* of how one equals three, and how three equals one.

And how we came to be in possession of this doctrine seems to have happened in this way: (I’m *way* over-simplifying) First, our ancient forebears had experiences of God. Second, they spent a lot of time reflecting on those experiences. And, third, they came to some conclusions about God based on those experiences, and based upon their reflections. And then, one day, somebody had the bright idea to write down everything they thought they knew about God, in order to preserve it for posterity.

In other words, the process, of developing a doctrine of God the Holy Trinity, seems to me to have been fairly subjective. And because we didn't have any objective evidence to back up our claims, we ended up calling it all a mystery.

And let me tell you, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity has constituted one of the core beliefs of the Christian Church for thousands of years. And so important was it to the church, that one of the ancient fathers of the church was bold enough to declare that, if you didn't fully embrace our doctrine of the Trinity, you couldn't rightly call yourself a Christian.

And that's one of the problems I have with this doctrine. It can easily become another tool by which we can divide people between "us" and "them." And don't we already have enough of those sorts of things already?

Another problem I have with this doctrine is the fact that it was initially developed at a time when even the most educated people had a very limited knowledge of the world, and nature, and the human body. Let me give you an example.

Our doctrine of the Trinity finds its expression in the two creeds that are employed by our prayer book, the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. The youngest of those two creeds, the Nicene Creed, was written in the fourth century. And at that time people believed that the Earth was at the center of the universe, and that the Earth was flat.

In other words, could people who had such a limited knowledge of the nature and characteristics of the physical world around them really be trusted to come up with the definitive statement of the character and nature of God? To be honest, I've always had trouble with that.

For me personally, and as someone who was born nearly seventeen hundred years after the Nicene Creed was developed, when I look at it, I see something that says way too much about some things, and way too little about others. And among those in the latter category, the most important thing *not* mentioned as being part of God's character and nature, is the love with which God holds us all.

If I were to try to explain to you the workings of the Holy Trinity, I would probably give you this example:

I, Jim Cook, am one person. However, I am the father of my children. I am the son of my parents. And I am the spouse of my wife. Each of those relationships is distinctly different from the others, and yet each is marked by love and commitment. And so, though I am one, I am also three.

I like that description of the Trinity, and I employ it frequently, but it's a description that's been determined to be heresy. By people who know better. Who lived thousands of years ago.

In the end, I find it ironic that the Christian Church ended up developed a doctrine of the Holy Trinity, when our immediate forebears, the Jews, had a fairly simple statement of faith: "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One."

My expectation is that, when our prayer book is revised – and I think a revision will be coming sooner than later – that it will still contain the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. Those

statements of faith are too important to discard any time soon. But my hope is that our new prayer book will contain one or more alternative options for a statement of faith.

I will end my sermon by reading to you a passage from the New Zealand Prayer Book. It already contains an alternative statement of faith that can take the place of the Apostles' or Nicene Creeds. And I think it's lovely.

You, O God, are supreme and holy.
You create our world and give us life.
Your purpose overarches everything we do.
You have always been with us.
You are God.

You, O God, are infinitely generous,
good beyond measure.
You came to us before we came to you.
You have revealed and proved
your love for us in Jesus Christ,
who lived and died and rose again.
You are with us now.
You are God.

You, O God, are Holy Spirit.
You empower us to be your gospel in the world.
You reconcile and heal; you overcome death.

You are our God. [And w]e worship you.