

Trinity Sunday  
May 30, 2021  
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God Is Not Bananas

*So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ-- if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. Romans 8:12-17*

*There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?*

*"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." John 3:1-17*

If you worshiped with us last week, you noticed that it was more exciting than usual. The altar hangings were red, flowers were red, the bells were ringing, there were balloons of red, orange and yellow and we heard about the coming of the Holy Spirit, sent to us by God after Jesus the Christ ascended into heaven. The Day of Pentecost is an exciting, joyful feast in the Church.

In contrast, today is Trinity Sunday, another major feast day in the Church. There are no balloons, the altar hangings are white, and we focus on the way that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three but one God, coeternal and coequal, and perhaps it is an effort to stay attentive, especially when it's a holiday weekend, the end of the school year, and the start of summer.

Understanding the Trinity is a lifelong endeavor, and many have tried to explain it. Once I told my priest I finally understood the Trinity and he lovingly said, “if you think you understand the Trinity, you are probably a heretic!” Even our best analogies will eventually fall apart.

An example of this is a children’s sermon on the Trinity, attempted by a friend. She sat down with the children and had a basket of bananas in her lap. Holding up one banana she asked the children how many bananas she was holding. They all answered, “one!” (So far, so good.) Then she cut the one banana into three equal parts and asked the children, “Do I still have one banana?” Some of them answered yes, others said no. (See how this gets complicated?) Then she explained that it was indeed still one banana, just in three equal parts. She explained how each part was banana, each part had a peeling and fruit inside, then she gave a banana to each of the children to take home. She ended the message by asking, “Later on, when you eat your banana, what are you going to think about?” And one precious child said, “God is bananas!” This is what happens almost every time we try to explain the Trinity!

Our readings today give us glimpses of the Trinity, as we hear about God, Jesus, and the Spirit, although scripture does not give us a fully developed doctrine of the Trinity. It’s as if God, speaking to us through the Word, is asserting that our concept of God is ever changing and growing and is experienced in countless ways in our relationships with God and neighbor.

How do we relate to God? Growing up Baptist we talked about Jesus a lot. I knew Jesus as Savior, I learned that I needed a personal relationship with Jesus, I related to Jesus as a friend who walked and talked with me. In seminary, my Presbyterian friends seemed to focus on God the Father, Almighty God, a God to be revered with awe, a God who was “up there” watching over us, somewhat distant. Along with God as Father and Son, I have also experienced God as Holy Spirit on retreats, in healing prayer services, and when singing praise songs about the Spirit with arms raised high, while people around me prayed in tongues.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; these are all one Trinitarian God, and yet, most of us are likely more comfortable with one person of the Trinity than with the other two. We may be afraid of the unpredictability of the Holy Spirit or long for her gentle comfort. We may experience the intimacy of Jesus beside us yet hesitate to join with Jesus as he cares for the sick, the friendless and the needy. The Almighty God the Father may instill fear of judgment or give us a sense of continual care and protection.

God is all of these things and is more, more than we will ever be able to describe. All three persons of the Trinity are important and necessary for fullness of faith. In many ways, the Trinity is a sign and metaphor for our own ways of living together, being different and yet being a part of the same life. Diverse, yet part of the whole. Our work as Christians is to grow in our relationship with the Trinity. This means that we are called to more than our individual or favorite or preferred way of being. As our relationship with God develops and grows, so will our relationship with our neighbor.

The One God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is always moving, creating, growing, and loving. As children of God we are called to this same way of being. We are called to stretch our expectations, to challenge assumptions, and to trust that God will be with us in all that we do.

This Trinitarian life is visible in the church as we worship, share in fellowship and care for one another, and as we serve the larger community. We are here today to worship but you are invited to join the holy work of God as we meet for fellowship this summer on the first Wednesday of each month for a picnic supper; you are invited to serve others by volunteering at the Hope Center food pantry – there will be more information about that in the eNews next week. You are invited to join us for our stewardship day when we will work together to care for our church, inside and out, next Saturday, June 5. These opportunities make God visible among us.

Each week, we confess our faith in the Triune God using the words of the Nicene Creed, a creed that came to be only after many years of prayer and debate and was finally adopted at the Council of Nicea in 325 CE. As we say the creed each week, notice when you feel pulled to a phrase or when a word causes you to stop and question your understanding. This is holy work, and it is ongoing.

One of the gifts of the Episcopal Church is that we invite the questions, we wrestle with the hard things and learn through our experiences together. It is not always easy, but it guarantees that we will grow in knowledge and love of God. We are a community of faith, relying on one another for wisdom, support, forgiveness, and speaking truth in love. We are individuals and we are one body.

All of that requires commitment to our individual growth, our church growth, and our life together in God. The one God, the holy and undivided Trinity is ruler and creator of all, the one who loves and redeems us, and is as near to us as our breath. Metaphors don't always work and God is not bananas, but if metaphors and bananas remind us of all of this, I imagine God says that's just fine. Amen.