

St. Columba's Episcopal Church
Trinity Sunday – June 15, 2025
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

Today is Trinity Sunday, the only Sunday in the church year set aside to commemorate a theological doctrine or teaching of the Christian church. Theology is, literally, the study of God. Theologians consider the nature of God, the nature of human beings, and the relationship between God and human beings. As an academic subject theology is similar to philosophy. Perhaps there is no other discipline in which it is more important to maintain a sense of humility, to remember that what we have to say about God is bound to be incomplete and inadequate. We need always to retain a fundamental sense of the mystery of God, even while we seek to come to the best understanding of God and our relationship with God that we can.

Theology has been described as “faith seeking understanding.” In other words, it is the effort of human beings who have faith in God to articulate the “who” and “what” and “why” of their faith. This work may always be beyond our reach, but for people of faith the questions of theology are important and pressing. Who is God and what is God like? What is my relationship with God supposed to be? How can I become closer to God? How does God want human beings to live? We don't need to be theologians to think about these sorts of questions.

We profess a belief that God is one God in three Persons. As we prayed in the Collect of the Day: we “acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of [the] divine Majesty ... worship the Unity.” The best minds have explained this by stating that God is a community, three persons in relationship and all always acting together. There is an essential and eternal unity among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Christ. Christ bears witness to the Father, and the Father glorifies the Son. No “person” of the Trinity acts differently or separately from the other “persons.” Believing, as we do, that God is love, we may describe the community of God as a community of love.

Before I speak further about that, I want to say a few words about the language we use to describe God. In worship we frequently “name” the persons of the Trinity. As Episcopalians we are most familiar with the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Though familiar, these names may not be helpful – in fact, they may be a hindrance – to many people, especially the name “Father.” Our experience of other human beings has a profound effect on our experience of God. That can be a plus or a minus. For people who have been deeply hurt or abandoned by a human father, calling God “Father” may block a close relationship with God.

We have many alternatives to this familiar language. Here we often use “Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit,” as we did in today's Opening Acclamation, or “Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.” In the New Zealand Prayer Book the persons of the Trinity are referred to as “Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, and Life-giver.” The 20th century writer on mysticism, Evelyn Underhill, described God as Creative Love, Rescuing Love, and

Indwelling, All-Pervading Love. Language that is less familiar to us may draw our attention to new ways of understanding the nature of God, and that may be very good.

We believe that the Trinity is a community of love, bound together so closely that we worship one God while acknowledging that God is love and has the perfect source of love, the perfect object of love, and the perfect expression of love, within God's own self. Before anything else came to be – before there was light, before stars, galaxies, planets, before plants and animals and human beings – there was a community of love. The basis of the whole universe is not a solitary Creator but a loving, reciprocal, responsive relationship. Love in community is not something that comes along later in the story of Creation, after there are human beings and animals to love. It is something there from before all worlds.

God is love: the Love arising from the Father, infinite, self-giving love, endlessly poured out. God is Love: the Love of the Son for the Father, infinite, self-giving love, endlessly received. God is Love: the bond of Love uniting the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, infinite, self-giving love, endlessly returned.

God is Love: love poured out, love received, love returned. The relationship of love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit has been described with the Greek term “perichoresis,” a dance of love. As creatures of God made in God's image, our task is to align ourselves with God and to express in our lives a human version of the dance – pouring out, receiving, and returning love to God and to our neighbors and ourselves, God's other creatures. We need to ask ourselves how our belief in the nature of God as love impacts the way we live. This is called “practical theology,” and it is the proper work of the church and of every Christian.

As we all know, living lives characterized by love is not always easy. Though we are made in God's image, loving doesn't always “come naturally” in our experience. Our love for God and our neighbor is “blocked” in various ways. Just as theologians have worked to articulate the nature of God, they have worked to describe these “blocks.” The results are varied. Think of the ancient list of “Seven Deadly Sins: pride, covetousness, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, and sloth.” Or think of a more modern understanding of sin as a general and pervasive preference for ourselves over others. Knowledge of human psychology can help us understand that when people are treated badly instead of lovingly, their ability to love is, in turn, damaged. On our own, a life of love would be beyond our reach.

But we are not on our own. As St. Paul writes in his letter to the church in Rome, “God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:5). The community of love whom we call God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – invites us to join the eternal dance of love. If I may put it this way, the Father doesn't send out the invitation and expect us to get to the dance on our own. The invitation is delivered by the Spirit who urges us to say “yes, I'd love to come.” The Son then shows us the way. May we say “yes” to that invitation with all our hearts. In the name of the Holy Trinity, One God of Love. Amen.