

**June 16, 2019 Holy Trinity Sunday**  
**Pastor Carolyn Albert Donovan**  
**Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas**

**GOSPEL**

**John 16:12-15**

The holy gospel according to Saint John, the sixteenth chapter.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

[Jesus said,] <sup>12</sup>“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup>He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup>All that the Father has is mine. For this reason, I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

When we speak of the Holy Trinity...God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...it usually doesn't take too long, after we get past God's name, itself, before we are grasping for analogies (clovers, apples, the phases of matter)...or trying to draw triangles...or interlocking knot-like shapes. Artists' depictions of it are sometimes three human figures...or sometimes two guys and a bird...

It doesn't take long before we start to look like a red-eyed, tousled-haired conspiracy theorist...with a wall of random images, words, and maps connected by a sprawling web of red string. The Trinity is beyond categories...beyond understanding...you could even say it's ineffable.

But that doesn't stop us from trying.

There are books upon books...and statements of doctrine. A concern for correct belief in the Triune God gave birth to the creed we will hear read today.

We won't all read it together...but instead, we will listen instead to three voices woven together to read words about the Triune God. This creed actually came into use hundreds of years after the ones we use more often, the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds...but it became important to many as an expression against Arianism...which was an early belief that the church rejected that said Jesus Christ could not be God because he was a creation of God.

Correcting this error was a deep concern to the early church...so much so that both the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds were composed (at least partly) to combat it...but also to the point that it led to fist fights at ecumenical councils (evidently). (If you didn't think St. Nicholas was cool enough for taking care of the poor in sneaky ways...and giving gifts to those in need...legend also has it that he punched Arius in the face at the Council of Nicea.)

Athanasius, the namesake of the creed we read today, though not its author, was another defender against this denial of Christ's divinity, which is one of the reasons this creed came to bear his name.

But why does all this matter? It's a fair question...It seems like more a matter of head than heart...all this effort to use the right words to understand the truth of who God is...and thus who we are.

As Lutherans, we inherit a big book of statements about faith called the Book of Concord...and tucked in there are the three ecumenical creeds – Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian.

When we hear the Athanasian Creed in a bit, I hope you hear some moments of beautiful poetry in it...but I also hope you hear how hard it is trying to draw lines that won't hold still...to define the boundary inside which you are safe and correct in faith...and outside of which you are not. I hope it even sounds funny sometimes to you. I hope it sounds like it is straining itself to a breaking point...like it is about to twist itself into a knot it can't get out of.

Because that is precisely what happens when we look for words about God, and when we draw lines between right and wrong belief...or create rigid categories for truth.

That is what happens when we speak in our head language about God, to the point of neglecting our hearts. It is ironic that our creeds can so often feel this way. Because the Latin *credo*...which means "I believe" does not so much mean "I give my intellectual assent." It would be truer to say that it means "I give my heart." To say "I believe" is to say "I give my heart to this..."

And each of our creeds describes God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit...A God who is in God's own self a relationship...but who still has so much heart to give...that God can't stand being alone...and calls out to create more relationships...to create light and dark...so that they might have each other...and water and dry land...and plants and animals...and a human...who needed still more relationship...just like God...so they needed another human...

And...well...the story goes on from there...

And here I want to pause and add another layer...and read something about relationships and differences...because when we begin to imagine these relationships at creation...sometimes we start making those rigid lines between things...those categories. We try so hard to define things by their difference...maybe a bit like the Athanasian Creed does...and we end up limiting the presence of God in the tunnel vision we create.

So, as we think of the Divine Relationship...of how it is woven throughout creation, I want to read something from a church leader who is transgender and who describes how much our vision of God's nature is widened when we see how trans and nonbinary siblings are a part of it. This is from Rev. Asher O'Callghan:

"In the beginning, God created day and night. But have you ever seen a sunset!?!? Well trans and non-binary people are kind of like that. Gorgeous.

Full of a hundred shades of color you can't see in plain daylight or during the night.

In the beginning God created land and sea. But have you ever seen a beach?!?! Well trans and non-binary people are kind of like that. Beautiful. A balanced oasis that's not quite like the ocean, nor quite like the land.

In the beginning, God created birds of the air and fish of the sea. But have you ever seen a flying fish, or a duck or a puffin that swims and flies, spending lots of time in the water and on the land!?!? Well trans and non-binary people are kind of like that. Full of life. A creative combination of characteristics that blows people's minds.

In the beginning, God also created male and female, in God's own image, God created them. So in the same way that God created realities in between, outside of, and beyond night and day, land and sea, or fish and birds, so God also created people with genders beyond male and female. Trans and non-binary and agender and intersex, God created us. All different sorts of people for all different sorts of relationships. Created from love to love and be loved. In God's image we live.

God is still creating you. You are no less beautiful and wild than a sunset or a beach or a puffin. You are loved. You have a place here.”

We are each imprinted with the divine relationship...We each express it.

In thinking about these things I am often reminded of a line from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself." The poem as a whole is a sort of hymn to ego...yet it contains truth and beauty. He asks: "Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself. (I am large, I contain multitudes.)" Perhaps Whitman felt within himself that multitudinous divinity, and egotistic as it may have been...he wasn't wrong.

On this Holy Trinity Sunday, as we listen to this strange creed...I wonder: what do we give our hearts to? I suspect that matters much more to God than a

catalog of right or wrong ideas in our heads. I suspect it matters more to our neighbors in this world, as well.

What do we give our hearts to? Really...

Perhaps our work, or family...perhaps our faith...

What do you fully, freely, and joyfully give your heart to?

Though it is hard to put into words, this community proclaims each week...in a variety of ways...that we give our heart to the one who gives their heart to us. That we give our hearts, together, to the work of healing the world. That we give our hearts to the hope that God has come to live among us, not because of our deserving...but because God's heart is so full of love for Creation.

To hear it this way...a creed is a dance...is a love song. And the dance of Trinity is one we don't know with our minds...but that we feel in our bones. It is the truth of God imprinted on our hearts, that leads us into a loving relationship...that leads us into life.

Thanks be to God. Amen.