

For this Presbyterian, the road to heresy is paved with sermons for 'Trinity Sunday.'

Now, chances are you didn't know today was called (in some church calendars) Trinity Sunday. And chances are that of all the named Sunday's in the church calendar, this is the least important/significant/meaningful Sunday of the bunch. And that's ok, because the idea - the 'doctrine' - of the Trinity is the most misunderstood, misrepresented and contentious idea in the history of Christian thought...and yet...

I baptize people in 'the name of the Trinity.' I invoke the Trinity at the Lord's table. I offer a Trinitarian benediction at the conclusion of every worship service I have ever conducted. The Presbyterian Church in Canada is fully and unashamedly "Trinitarian" in its creeds, subordinate standards and Theological foundations.

Trinity gives Christians a way to talk about what God may be like. It offers a solid, tangible 'definition' of something that we also acknowledge as being beyond human understanding. This ancient concept has been endlessly debated - occasionally disputed - and lovingly lampooned for as long as the church has existed, yet is difficult to find examples of Trinitarian language in Scripture. A 'Divine mystery' indeed.

Matthew's Gospel ends with this charge: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."

And it is the only use of this particular phrase in all of Scripture. Trinity is hard to pin down, and as much as I love a good, nebulous definition (encouraging lively

conversation, and all that) I'm bold to wonder if three is enough 'persons' to attribute to God?

Moses and the other patriarchs didn't worry too much about the numbers. Burning bushes, miracles and visions; pillars of fire and strange visitors at the door of the tent. Back in the day, God was God and appeared in a manner best suited to the occasion. The glimpse that the faithful were given (when given a glimpse at all) was fleeting and partial - the wholeness of God was never doubted, but it was never on display either.

The Psalmist tried a new approach - God's glory manifest in the whole of creation - the heavens are telling, and all that - knowledge, experience, a sense of awe; these were things that help the faithful recognize God's presence - God's goodness - and, by extension, help discern God's purpose for them.

Prophets and visionaries continued to wrestle with the idea of God - though none doubted God's presence - or worried about getting their definitions right.' It took Jesus to set us on that road.

Jesus; who talked about God like no one we'd ever heard before. Jesus; who gave us a glimpse of God that was strangely and dangerously personal. Jesus, whom the gospels named 'anointed' and whom the apostles called teacher, then LORD - Jesus, who introduces the notion that God's Spirit is a gift that keeps on giving - a gift that empowers and enables 'mere humans' to aspire to something as grand and fantastical as the kingdom of God.

When we talk about Trinity, we are actually bringing together each of these separate strands of understanding into something complicated and full of wonder. And so, while three may not be enough to describe the aspects of God, three is

the bare minimum - in spite of the dictum from Deuteronomy that declares God to also be a singularity.

Declarations of faith have, for centuries, hinged on descriptions of Jesus' relationship to God. That matters a great deal (it seems) to Christians to this day. But rather than getting tangled up in arguments over these definitions, many in the church (including me) have taken a wider view. There is a relationship between the way we experience God and the way we describe God. Jesus is key to that relationship for us, and we find our way through the maze of historical definitions and understandings in our own time. But following Jesus through the gospels, we might also discover that God is God, and the formula, principles, doctrines and definitions we develop to explain what that means often serve only to muddy the waters. Jesus talks in riddles and parables - and offers miracles that help us see God at work. The poetry of the Psalms opens our minds to the scope of Divine Mystery. Being reminded of Moses' encounter with God - or Elijah, or Abraham, or David or Daniel or any number of poets and prophets captured in Scripture - all suggest a power at work beyond our collective comprehension. That we struggle to explain, define or imagine that power says more about us than it does about God.

Three is a good starting point when describing the indescribable. Father-Son-Spirit are essential landmarks when navigating the Christian faith. But those landmarks point to a majesty that is beyond words. Just as the resurrection leaves us curious and hopeful about the nature of life and death, the Trinity keeps us curious and hopeful about the nature of God's relationship to humanity. And it is our curiosity that helps us navigate these divine mysteries, not searching for certainty, but delighting in the eternal variety of the divine.