

+Sermon for Holy Trinity Sunday – June 18/19, 2011 – Matt. 28:16-20

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we remember and celebrate a number of things. For one, today is Trinity Sunday...a day in which we remember one of the fundamental doctrines of the Faith. It is *the* Christian doctrine of God and anyone who calls themselves Christian believes in this doctrine. Today we also receive a handful of new members...people who have taken a strong step in their journey of discipleship to say, “You know what, this is my church, this is where I have been worshipping and will continue to worship, I will continue to support this church with my time, talents, and gifts.”

So what I’m getting at here is that those two things belong together; doctrine and discipleship. As Jesus himself tells us in today’s Gospel reading, “teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you.” We might revisit some things today that we focused on in May, when we focused on discipleship while walking through the First Letter of Peter...so if I sound redundant, I’m just doing as my Lord commands me.

Doctrine and discipleship – two important, but often misunderstood words. So let me lay them out for you because both doctrine and discipleship are an invitation for us into the greatest mystery of all; God.

One definition of mystery: Any affair, thing, or person that presents features of qualities so obscure as to arouse curiosity or speculation.

Doctrine – Something that helps me think about doctrine is that we think of doctrine like a map...or for those of you who don’t use maps anymore, think of doctrine like a GPS. You want

to go somewhere and you could do two things – you can call up a friend or ask someone how to get where you need to go and simply trust their directions. Of course, they might know the way to go, but if you simply rely on what someone else says without checking other sources, you're taking a bit of a risk trying to get where you need to go. Now, if you look at a map ahead of time, or plug in the place where you need to go in your GPS, you know and trust that those maps have been made by geographers or cartographers and satellites...maps or GPS's have lots and lots of knowledge and experience behind them. So who or what would you rather trust...one person's personal experience of getting somewhere, or the experience of up-to-date technology and all sorts of knowledge gained from geographers, cartographers, etc.

So doctrine is like a good map or a good GPS that helps to show you and give you a more complete picture of who God is. The doctrine of the Trinity is one of those pictures, one of those maps, that has been charted for us already by many, many Christian brothers and sisters that have come before us, who have come before us grounded in the revealed Word in Scripture, but also grounded in the community of the faithful. The fact that God is Three-in-One, the fact that God is One-in-Three, is not a mathematical equation...though if you wanted to use math you could say that $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$. That God is a Trinity is because that is how God wanted and wills to be known. We see that in our Genesis text, how God created, spoke all that is into existence, and how God's *Ruach*, God's Spirit, translated as wind in our text, hovered over creation to keep it under control. We also see the Trinity at work, Father, Son, and Spirit when Jesus was baptized. The Father spoke, "This is my Son, in whom I'm well pleased to dwell." The Son walked the earth, and the Spirit descended from the heavens and sent Jesus on his way toward the cross. And if we look at the big picture of the Bible, the big map of the Bible, we see how God the

Father created, the Son was sent by the Father to redeem and reconcile all of creation, and how the Spirit guided and nurtured the early church, and still does guide and nurture the church.

How can God be a Trinity? I can't explain how God can be, but I can, like other Christians before have, point you to Scripture where it shows that this is how God wants to be known – as Father, Son, and Spirit. One God, three persons. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God, yet there are not three gods, but one God. It ultimately is a mystery and our feeble human words can only say so much, but God has given us words to use, and has revealed Himself in Scripture and in human history and wants to be known that way. And here are some implications for the God-ness of God. If the Father isn't God...then who or what created you and all that exists? If the Son isn't God, then you are stuck in your sins and what Jesus did was all a charade and doesn't really matter. And if the Holy Spirit isn't God, then the Father has lied to us about the work of His Spirit, the prophets and the apostles have lied to us about the Spirit, and Jesus has also lied to us about the Spirit who brings us to faith and who gives us what Jesus won on the cross for each of you, namely, forgiveness and eternal life. In John 16 (:13-15), Jesus says, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all 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. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 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 Trinity, though ultimately a mystery, has profound implications for us. One of most important implications it has for us is that God is a community within God's self. God is a unity with diversity. And so, consequentially, is the church. The church is one. Though it has many members, look different in different times and places, the church remains one, universal, holy, catholic and apostolic church. The church is united in the midst of all its diversity.

Also, the doctrine of the Trinity teaches us that God is personal. God wants and wills to be known. God wants and wills to be known, not as a generic “god,” but the one true God who reveals Himself as Father, Son, and Spirit...3 persons, one undivided essences. The work of the Father is primarily associated with creation, the work of the Son is primarily associated with salvation or redemption, and the work of the Spirit is primarily associated with sanctification or, making us holy. So the Father gives of himself in creation, the Son gives of himself for us in salvation by dying on the cross, and the Spirit gives of himself through the preaching of the gospel to create faith where there was none. So God wants to be known, but God wants to be known by God’s name; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as Jesus reminds us from the text today from Matthew 28.

Doctrine; it’s important as it helps us to navigate life through the teachings of Scripture. The Trinity; an essential doctrine to be believed not because we say its true, but because that is how God wants to be known in all His Majesty and also mystery.