

**A SERMON GIVEN BY REV. PAUL J. KOTTKE  
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**Sunday, May 30, 2010**

**Title:** Can This Possibly Be True

**Scripture:** Psalm 8 and John 16:12-15

**Theme:** As our honoring of the past, we remember those who have given their lives for the sake of the abundance of life for others. We engage the present with a conviction of being Disciple leaders for the Body of Christ into the world. And we look into the future with hope and trust in the goodness of God's presence ever with us – in the times of joy, as well as the times of deep heartbreak.

In the liturgical year, this Sunday is recognized as Trinity Sunday. Last Sunday, we celebrated Pentecost Sunday – beginning our focused attention on the presence of the Holy Spirit in our faith journey. Every year, on the Sunday following Pentecost is the focus on the Trinity. Why? To ensure that we understand the Holy Spirit as an integral expression of God.

The liturgical year serves a straightforward purpose – to be a teachable tool in understanding our experiences with God. There is nothing magical about it. Scholars and church leaders long ago designated certain events at certain times of the calendar year, beginning with Christmas and Easter. And from there developed the cycles of Advent and Epiphany around Christmas, the acknowledgement of the Incarnation of God and of Lent and Pentecost around Easter, the acknowledgement of the Reconciliation of God. In between these cycles, the Sundays that are not specifically designated are simply referred to as Ordinary Sundays. This liturgical calendar becomes a discipline for us so that we keep a dynamic engagement with God.

It is so easy to narrow our relationship with God into one expression such as “Jesus Christ as Lord” to the exclusion of the other ways in which we are to know and experience God. God's relationship with us is not static, not set in one and only one experience. Rather it is unfolding, ever alive – in the same way that

creation, that nature is every alive and changing all around us.

Yet, even the liturgical year falls short of fully exploring who and what God is for us. But it is a starting place. It builds a foundation that we revisit every year and then individually as we are ready, we move into new areas of exploration. But without this invaluable foundation, we would easily become lost as in a vast ocean.

So within this liturgical cycle, one of the central expressions of God that we declare is that of the Trinity: One God as three expressions: Father/Mother/Creator who brings forth life and love; Jesus Christ who declared himself as the Son yet One with the Father; and the Holy Spirit who resides within us as the Second Coming of the Divine [not external but internal]. How are we to understand the relationship of these three? How is it that we do not treat them as three entities separate from each other? Or if we are really in a question mode, can we know that this Trinity business could possibly be true?

At the Family camp these last few days, I had the joy of witnessing all the relationships of a vibrant community: parent to child, children to children, adult to adult, the child, or adult alone sitting on a chair or exploring a small section of the grounds. Alone and yet in community. The same people but in a different identity depending on their relationship.

This is also true of the relationships with biological family: a son or daughter becomes a father or mother, and then the father or mother becomes a grandparent to their grandchildren. Role into this the covenant of husband and wife – the same person within multiple relationships.

So that makes sense, we know God is multiple ways – but why three? Why not four or ten or infinite ways of knowing? For this we have to turn to the scriptures. And yet in a curious way the scriptures do not make any overt statement regarding the Trinity *per se*. Yes, there is the one passage that closes out the Gospel According to Matthew “Go...baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...” [28.19] And yet, most scholars will acknowledge the likelihood that this verse was not the word of Jesus but of the early Church that went back into the gospel account and added this injunction.

But there are passages that make clear statements about our relationship with God. For instance, from Psalm 8: *O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory about heavens. Out of the mouths of babes and infants...* As if to say that God’s glory comes forth from the mouths of our children – something that I experienced these last two days.

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established...* A clear affirmation of God as the Creator of nature.

*What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than [Yourself] and crowned them with glory and honor.* An acknowledgement that we have a unique relationship in all of creation with God.

From the Gospel According to John, these words of Jesus to the disciples:

*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now...* God’s revelation is continues to be unfolding.

*When the Spirit of truth comes...* This indwelling presence of God always nudges us towards that which is right and true.

*The Spirit will glorify me...All that the Father has is mine...* One of the few passages that has mention of the three aspects of the Trinity: Spirit, Jesus, and Father.

So though there is little or no direct mention of the Trinity in the scriptures, the words of Jesus in the gospel accounts mention various aspects of the Holy Three and a clear declaration that there is a radical unity among them. The early Church took this very serious: how could we worship Jesus and still believe in the One Monotheistic God? It is the wrestling with this relationship that culminated with the Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E. with what is known as the Nicene Creed:

*We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, Of all that is seen and unseen.*

*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, Eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light...*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, Who proceeds from the Father and the Son,*

While this creed has been affirmed for the last 1,700 years, there is no doubt that the Trinity resides deeply in questions and even mystery. It is this unsettledness that invites our relationship with God to be ever seeking, ever dynamic, ever open to new possibilities.

I close with this quote from our prayer book regarding the Trinity [A Guide to Prayer for All God’s People, p.196]

*Since God is far beyond our limited comprehension, we can understand why different people view God in different ways. Several of these ways can be widely convincing since they are based*

*on quite evident aspects of reality. Even the most skeptical or scientifically rigorous person is likely to accept one or more of the following views.*

- *There is certainly a fundamental, sustaining force or energizing power in all of reality. We can think of God as this ground of being.*
- *There is that which holds reality together in unity and order, and sustains spontaneity within a framework of regularity.*
- *There are also unrealized potentialities in persons, nature, and society. We can think of God as a power establishing and sustaining these possibilities, or as the creative process in all reality.*
- *We can see God as the source of values such as truth, beauty, goodness, and love.*

*In all these respects God is here now, as well as everywhere always. God is continuously active in all of reality. We cannot remove ourselves from God's presence.*

*[Explorations in Meditation and Contemplation, by Harvey Seifert]*

This morning, then, as our honoring of the past, we remember those who have given of their lives for the sake of the abundance of life for others. We engage the present with a conviction of being Disciple leaders for the Body of Christ into the world. And we look into the future with hope and trust in the goodness of God's presence ever with us – in the times of joy, as well as the times of deep heartbreak.

In this assurance and peace we live and move and have our being, in the name of the God of Creation, who has given you your life and all your abundance. In the name of Jesus Christ who has made reconciliation from brokenness into wholeness, from death into life a reality. And in the name of the Holy Spirit, who is the presence of God closer to us than even our breath. Can this possibly be true? Yes - it is more true than we can possibly know.