

Sunday, May 26, 2024
Trinity Sunday

Solemn Eucharist
11:00 am

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A Sermon by

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Trinity Sunday 2024 Sermon

Trinity Sunday is the only day within the church's year that is devoted exclusively to the doctrine of the Trinity, and while not specifically named as such in scripture, the bible is overflowing with references to God, to Jesus and to the Holy Spirit. It is in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit that we have once again entered into worship today. The same prayer with and in which we were all baptized and others were added to our number only last Sunday on the Feast of Pentecost. And they who like us, from 'the cradle to the grave', will continue to both recite in word and trace on our heads and our hearts, this specifically Christian signature, until we go to meet our Great Father of Glory, of splendor and light.

The sign of the Cross, the sign of the Trinity is the very same mark of faith in which confessors have faced persecution, martyrs have shed blood and that missionaries have spread Good News. Indeed, had someone not shared the God's Holy Word with us none of us will be here at Saint Thomas this morning.

There have of course been multiple attempts to explain what the doctrine of the Trinity might mean. Mystics and theologians have grappled with and often articulated plausible insights into this phenomenon over the centuries. The same Trinity which St. Athanasius is claimed to have said is not immortal or invisible, but 'incomprehensible'. The same Trinity about which Julian of Norwich shared a threefold revelation that 'all shall be well' and St. Augustine reflected on as the undivided, equal relational love found within the three in one and one in three, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

In a desire to both articulate and comprehend this doctrine, many people have turned to the arts to catch a glimpse of the Trinity both as mystery and a foundation of faith. Over the years new images have also come to light, such as that of Jeremy Begbie, musician and theologian who suggests we turn to music to *experience* this doctrine, wherein each person Father, Son and Holy Spirit is distinctive, and yet equally connected, attuned or resonant like a three-note harmonious chord.

Celtic symbols and static venn-like diagrams are often presented as summaries of what the doctrine of Trinity might mean. There was one I recall carved in a pew in my home parish church to which my Rector, Canon Hatch, who wasn't one for visual aids, would refer to each year in Confirmation Class.

As it happens the parish I was raised in, in the south-east of England was dedicated to the Holy Trinity. You would therefore think having heard 17 years of sermons I would have plenty of insights into this

beloved doctrine. I do not. Holy Trinity, Rayleigh however was the place of my baptism, confirmation and the foundation of my faith journey. It became a community where I discovered that the Christian signature was not only for my head but would capture my heart. In the witness of that place the doctrine of Holy Trinity for me became not simply something to *know about*, but something rooted in a mysterious relationship, or rather someone *to know*.

Above the choir stalls was a large rood screen (which has since been removed) bearing one of the most famous words in Christendom, John 3:16 *God so loved the world, that he gave his only beloved Son*. Beneath this screen we would sing Stainer's *Crucifixion* or Maunder's *Olivet to Calvary* each Good Friday. Here, I discovered what it was to say, believe and sing – Just as I am, I come. Holy Trinity therefore meant belonging to and with a God who wasn't inaccessible or hid, absent from our eyes, but one who was loving and truly present in a community of worship and welcome, a community active in hospitality and mission.

Each Trinity Sunday we would process through the 12th century Church singing *Blessed City, Heavenly Salem*, concluding with our 'creed', *Laud and honour to the Father, Laud and honour to the Son, Laud and honour to the Spirit, ever Three and ever One*.

We would then pause in procession, for what seemed an age, by our foundation stone. It was a day to review our purpose, to look back and admire the view, where we have come from, to give thanks for where we were now, and look ahead to where we are going in our sometimes-uncertain journey together. All within a church which still seeks to be **'God centered, Jesus led, Holy Spirit inspired, Bringing his love to others'**.

As Trinity Sunday falls once again at a time of remembrance and reflection, I have found myself reflecting on the Holy Trinity not as a complex theory but a relational image that speaks of presence and belonging, not only in terms of the past, but as many of us have been considering, how might we *bring and be his love to others* here at Saint Thomas, in the center of Midtown Manhattan, in this diverse, worldwide and digital community.

Before us here beside the pulpit, and in your leaflet, we have a copy of the famous 15th Century Rublev icon wherein three figures, which depict the hospitality of Abraham, also point us to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as the embodiment of unity, presence and love. Within this icon, *'The Father looks forward, raising his hand in blessing to the Son. This is my Son, listen to him... The hand of the Son points on, around the circle, to the Spirit. In this simple array we see the movement of life towards us. The Father sends the Son, the Son sends the Spirit. The life flows clockwise around the circle. And we are invited to complete the circle with both our presence and response'*⁽¹⁾.

This icon conveys so many other layers of meaning about presence, welcome and hospitality that we could be here all day exploring them, we won't of course, but I commend this icon to your prayers in the coming weeks.

Today as we celebrate Trinity Sunday, I wonder as we gather at the table, this table, and are fed by *the* divine presence here, how might we respond to the invitation of the Trinity be present to one another and the hundreds of visitors who enter our church and join us on line each week? How might we be more welcoming or hospitable to those who like the passing crestfallen characters in Norman Rockwell's 20th Century painting outside Saint Thomas⁽²⁾, who do not Lift up their eyes above the steps to the gate of heaven because it or we make God seem inaccessible, hid from their eyes. And too,

in this Trinity, ordinary or growing time, I wonder, how might we respond to the invitation to complete the circle, to be more relational than transactional with our neighbor and collaborate *together* to make known the real presence of the Holy Trinity both in and beyond this place, In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.



1. *The Trinity, also called The Hospitality of Abraham, is an icon created by Russian painter Andrei Rublev in the early 15th century*



2. *Lift up Thine Eyes by Norman Rockwell (1894–1978)*