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# The World in Threes

**Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 15 June 2025 Trinity Sunday**

Romans 5:1-5 • John 16:12-15

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May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Today is Trinity Sunday, when we remember and affirm one of the most difficult of Christian teachings: that our God is one God, yet made up of three persons: God, Christ and Holy Spirit. These three persons are co-equal — that is, no one has precedence over the others. God is not the greater person, with Jesus and the Spirit lesser persons; for all are God. The three are also co-eternal, having always existed from the beginning.

This last claim is pretty easy to understand. Look at the first chapter of Genesis:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

(Genesis 1:1-2)

And the first chapter of John's Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made. (John 1:1-3)

God, the Spirit and Jesus Christ, called the Word because he spoke the world into being, were all there from the very beginning. All participated in the creation of the world we know and everything in it; and all shared the great love for that creation which is the essence of God to us. Note John says: "the Word was God." Not just with God, but of the same identity. Similarly, in Genesis, the Spirit is called "the Spirit of God." Not just with God, but of God. All three are of the same substance, the same make-up. Some people like to think of a triangle of equal sides, with God, Jesus and the Spirit at the three corners, yet no one greater than or separated from the others. Some like to think of a circle, with the three dancing around it, all joined together and no one greater than another, as a circle has no corners, no sides. Some like to think of Neapolitan ice cream: three flavours, yet still one ice cream!

We learn a bit more about the Trinity from several passages in the Bible. Jesus says, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), and

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? (John 14:9-10)

You cannot separate Son from Father; they are one. Jesus came to show us what God is like. Only God's Son could undertake such a mission. Jesus is continually surprised that the disciples do not understand this immediately, but they, after all, would know from their upbringing and their study of the Scriptures that no one has seen God; and indeed, as Moses' people told him at the foot of Mt Sinai, they believed that to see God would be fatal to them. But with Jesus in front of them, they do indeed see God, although it takes them a little while to understand that. God brought himself down to human level — what great love this alone shows! — in order to be with his people and to encourage them to know him intimately, which is something God has been doing since the fall of Adam and Eve.

Later, in that same passage from John, Jesus says, "The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them," and "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them," and "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love" (John 14:21, 23 & 15:9).

The Trinity is, quite simply, love. We may not truly understand how one God can be three persons until we stand face to face with our God; but we can

understand the great love that God has for us all. I believe that is why Jesus does not spell out to our satisfaction just how this mystery works. It is not the most important thing. As Jesus says, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12). What is this love with which we are to love each other? Is it a purely human love, or does it partake of the divine?

The essence of the Trinity is the bond between God and Jesus and Spirit. That bond is a mutual love, from which all our earthly love comes. If you go back to the circle or the triangle, love is the line between God and Jesus, Jesus and the Spirit, and back to God again. We love because God first loves us. St Augustine, the church father born in the fourth century, spoke of the Trinity as the lover (God), the one loved (Jesus) and love itself (the Spirit). So if the three are one, then the circle is complete.

In our own relationships, we echo the same model. In order to love, we must first have love in us; where does this love come from? Paul tells us in our passage from Romans that “God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” (5:5). So love, in the form of the Spirit, comes to us at our baptisms, as it came upon the disciples on the first Pentecost. And then we must have an object of that love — husband, wife, son, daughter, friend — just as God has Jesus the Son, and Jesus has God the Father. And in order to make the cycle complete, that love must be returned. Oh, we sometimes love without it being returned, but God’s design is for reciprocal love, as between the Father and the Son. Indeed, if we were all to obey Jesus’s commandment, all love would be reciprocal, given out and returned simultaneously, all around the world. We see this model in the world. When I perform a wedding ceremony for two people, I try to impress upon them that they are in a sort of trinity: both partners love God and love each other, which makes three in a circle. Mother and father and child make another trinity. Communion can be seen as a trinity, with Jesus, priest and people forming a circle.

The Trinity, then, is a model not only for understanding God, but for understanding the world, as God designed it and would like to see it. We may not have a full understanding of the three-in-one as it pertains to Father, Son and Spirit, but we can still model our own lives after this fundamental truth. In Jesus’ name, amen.