

“3 in 1”
May 26, 2013
(Trinity Sunday)

Romans 5:1-5

1 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3 More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. Doesn't that last verse just resonate? Last Sunday we celebrated the Holy Spirit being poured into our hearts on Pentecost. We lit candles to represent our own sparks being lit. I would like to hope that we are all excited and on fire for the Lord. Well, if you'll remember I mentioned a fire needs fuel to burn. Learning the foundations of our faith is incredibly important for all of us. Sometimes we are hearing new things other times we are just reinforcing what we already know. Today we attempt to understand a little bit better a difficult theological concept. Today is known as Trinity Sunday in the life of the church. It is the Sunday where we celebrate the ways we know and understand God.

We are all aware of the many names for God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. They are referred to often in songs we sing, prayers we pray and in the language we use as Christians today. We also often interchange them with little thought to their very different identities. This scripture in Romans is one of the few that explicitly refers to all three and lays them out to actually have very different identities.

Words have explicit power in our lives. Our intentional or unintentional use of words can be rather important as a Christian. You see we can not quite claim that they are all one in the same because they are most decidedly not all given the same tasks to accomplish in our faith lives. So we err when we interchange their identities and purpose as all the same. I mean if you think about those 3 in 1 body deals. You know the ones I mean that are shampoo, conditioner, and body wash all in one bottle. It depends on where you put it that makes it some of what it is. It is not shampoo when you are using it on your loofah, or body wash in your hair. This is similar, grant you not perfect, to how we can understand the Trinity. It very much depends on where you put it, use it, and grow from it that makes the Trinity what it is as a single entity often referred to as the Godhead and its other identities.

Are we confused yet?

As I said this is a really difficult theological concept, one that is hard to lay claim to and also hard to explain to others but our intentional use of Father, Spirit and Son is something we can not not pay attention to. Our intentionality becomes especially important when we are learning about our faith or sharing it with others who are not used to our Christian ways.

Romans is a unique letter out of the Paulian Letters. The church in Romans was not founded by Paul. Dated around 57 the letter expresses Paul's desire to visit the church in Rome after he has visited Jerusalem and it subtly hopes they will help him further his missions west. It is also a letter that is sent to remind the church in Romans of some of its own identity and foundations of both Gentile and Jew origins. The letter stresses that the Gospel is needed by both groups of people. This reminder is important due to the Edict of Claudius given by the Emperor Claudius. Emperor Claudius around 47 expelled the Jews from Rome due to some infraction but he had since died. With Emperor Claudius' death the Jews were allowed back into Rome. There was however, a slight problem, in the intervening time some changes had occurred to the Church in Rome under Gentile leadership and the Gentiles were not welcoming to the Jews

who were returning. Paul in this letter is hoping to address this lack of hospitality and also give himself authority for his mission of the Gospel as he hopes to head west into Spain.

The concepts of intentionality and hospitality are at its core what this passage is leading us to study and explore. The Gentiles and the Jews were struggling how to reconcile their now differing ideas with one another. Their struggle led to a lack of hospitality and discomfort in the sharing with one another in worship. They no longer knew what and how each other viewed the varying aspects and so the Jews were made to feel unwelcomed and the Gentiles did not know how to open their doors.

So how do we view God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit as Disciples of Christ? What do we believe and do we know it enough to share it with others? A large portion of church hospitality is to know our faith so that those we encounter, often those who come in our doors, can learn by our intentional example and share in our knowledge. I hope to give us just a taste to whet our learning appetites about the faith we share together and perhaps a little bit better understanding of the Trinity. I hope this so that we can be more intentional in the faith we share as we welcome all who come in our doors.

So let us talk about God. The very first line we read of God in scripture is “In the Beginning God.” God is the first part of the Trinity that we are introduced to and we as Christians are monotheists, this means that we believe in one deity and that deity is the triune God. In light of the Trinity God is described as the Creator, the Father/Mother figure. God’s attributes and characteristics are described as omniscience which is infinite knowledge and the all-knowing, omnipotence which is unlimited power, omnipresence which means present everywhere and in everything, and omnibenevolence which is perfect goodness. God is also eternal and necessary existence.

These attributes of God are mainly gleaned from our First Testament knowledge of whom and what God is to the ancient people of Israel and us today. However, the image of the Father is very much a part of the New Testament. As we are a New Testament church founded on our beliefs in Jesus as the Christ and Son of the Living God who is Lord and Savior of our Lives it is important to realize that God is looked at differently depending on where and what you are reading. This is some of that sticky nature of our Triune God because Jesus lays claim in scripture that he himself is at once both God’s Son and also God and also at some points the Spirit.

Jesus as the Christ is the human incarnation of God. Jesus walked and talked among us and then died and rose again. Jesus as a part of the trinity is probably the part we are most familiar with and the one we refer to the most as we are called Christians and Disciples of Christ for a reason. In that Jesus’ Trinity description is, but not limited to, the Son, the Redeemer. We get to know Jesus as the Son of God and our Redeemer throughout the Gospels and the New Testament.

Then, as we talked about on Pentecost, we get to know the somewhat elusive member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. I say elusive because the Christian Church Disciples of Christ has historically not been super wonderful about emphasizing the Spirit and its unique nature. The Spirit has often just been rolled up into our understanding of God. This has been evolving in recent years and so becomes even more important for us to understand.

The Holy Spirit, is primarily another New Testament understanding of God although as in Jesus the Spirit is referred to in the First Testament. The Spirit is that which we take with us, the presence of God in each of us is made possible through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has some physical descriptions such as flame and wind, but the basic understanding is that we do not see the Spirit but we know the Spirit is present and it is again how we reconcile God’s physical presence among us as Jesus is no longer physically present.

A short, somewhat crazy, and not even close to what we could really get into explanation when it comes to the Trinity. But hopefully we are seeing a bit more of why we need to be intentional in our faith. Our intentionality is

important in our hospitality because it makes all aware of what we do and why we do it. A professor of mine in Seminary always asked us this question; what are we teaching and learning when we walk through the doors of our church?