

**+ John 16:12-15 + The Truth About the Trinity +  
+ 1st Sunday after Pentecost: Holy Trinity + 31 May 2015 +**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When you came to church today, did you notice what we're celebrating? Perhaps you noticed the church decorated in white once more or the green, three-part banner hanging on the wall over there. Hopefully, you looked at the cover of the worship folder and after skimming past the words "First Sunday after Pentecost," you noticed the words "Holy Trinity." Then perhaps you paged through the worship folder and noticed a couple hymns in different places and an unusually long, responsive reading of something called the "Athanasian Creed" that starts before the sermon and ends after the sermon. In all of that, did you notice what we're celebrating today?

We're celebrating the Holy Trinity. We're celebrating God today. In a way, you could say that we celebrate the Holy Trinity in some way, shape, or form every Sunday, because every Sunday is about our God. Yet today is unique because we focus our attention on who God is and what his essence is—one God, yet three persons, while also focusing on what the triune God has done and continues to do for us and many others.

Naturally, today would then be a good day to focus on the truth of the Trinity—to focus on what we can know and understand about the triune God, but that's where things get tricky. You see, the Scriptural teaching of the Holy Trinity goes beyond what our human minds can comprehend. The true God is one God, yet at the same time three co-equal persons. For that reason, illustrations and analogies trying to describe the Trinity always falls short.

For example, God is not like a glass of water, some rising steam, and a tray of ice cubes, where are all water, but in different forms. A slightly better illustration would be that all the water in the glass would at the same time also have to be all the water in the steam and all the water in the ice cubes, while at the same time, all the water in the steam would also have to be all the water in the glass and all the water in the ice cubes, while at the same time, all the water in the ice cubes would also have to be all the water in the glass and all the water in the steam. Makes your head hurt, doesn't it?

The Athanasian Creed doesn't say much more even as it defends against those who tried to subject the triune God to their human reason, which only led to false teaching about the triune God. The truth is, the Scriptural teaching of the Trinity is one of those teachings that goes so far beyond our comprehension that one of the most intelligent Bible scholars who ever served in our church body once admitted, ***"Sometimes you have to take off the hat of reason and simply stand in awe of the mystery of God."***

It's quite humbling when you have to admit that the triune God is beyond your comprehension, that you are unable to wrap your mind around who God is. Admitting that the truth of the Trinity goes beyond what you can understand can be discouraging too. After all, you and I would prefer to have a God whom we can understand and comprehend and define in simple human terms and concepts. We would prefer a God who can easily fit into some little cubbyhole in our minds, whom we can bring out when we need him and tuck him away when we don't, who isn't greater than us and therefore capable of terrifying us with the reality that he is all-present, all-knowing, and almighty, who knows and has seen all our secret sins and will judge us in the end.

That's a truth about the Trinity that you and I can't handle—the reality that this holy, almighty, incomprehensible God rules and knows all things and will judge us in the end. By nature, we hate to hear such truth. We hate to hear that God will condemn us for our sins. We can't bear to hear that truth about our God. Now why is that? The Apostle Paul explains, ***"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him and he cannot understand them..."*** (1 Corinthians 2:14) The reason is sin. Sin has so corrupted our hearts and minds that we can't bear to hear the truth about the Trinity.

Jesus' disciples had a similar problem on the night he was betrayed. That night Jesus had been teaching his disciples many things. He knew he was going to be betrayed and arrested and tortured and finally killed within the next 24 hours. He wanted to prepare his disciples for the difficult days ahead, especially those three days before he would rise from the dead, but emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, they could only take in so much. So Jesus told them, ***"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear."*** They weren't ready to hear the truth, to hear everything.

So Jesus made them a promise. After he would suffer, die, and rise again, he would teach them some more, but then he would graciously send the Holy Spirit to help them understand the truth. ***"But when he, the Spirit***

**of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.**" The Holy Spirit would show Jesus' disciples the way to remembering what he had taught them. The Holy Spirit would bring them understanding, would make known to them the truth of the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—and they would record it for all who would follow them in the centuries that followed down to us today.

Yes, we can't wrap our minds around the truth about the Holy Trinity. Because of our sinful natures, we can't handle the truth of God's holiness, power, and majesty. Yet Jesus' promise is for us too. As with his disciples, God the Holy Spirit—**"the Spirit of truth"**—has to guide us **"into all truth"** for us to understand Scripture's teaching.

Through the Gospel, through the Word of God, the Holy Spirit shows you the way to the Truth that brings you life. The Holy Spirit shows you the way to remember and understand the truth about the Trinity, about the work of God the Son and the self-sacrificing love of God the Father for you, while helping you to recognize the limitations of your own human reason. When the Holy Spirit shows you the way to the Truth through his Word, he doesn't give you some brilliant insight into the mystery of the Trinity, but he shows you the work that the triune God has accomplished on your behalf.

Through that Word, God the Holy Spirit reveals how God the Father created you and every human being as his special creation, how he provides for all your daily needs along with those of all creation, and how he preserves you as his child through faith that the Holy Spirit planted in your heart. Above all, the Holy Spirit reveals the completely undeserved, self-sacrificing love of God the Father for a world of sinners who naturally hate his guts—a love that moved him to send Jesus, God the Son, to be your Savior and mine.

That's why Jesus took on your human flesh and became an infant like you. He did it for you! That's why he was born into poverty. That's why he grew and lived a perfect life submitting to his own holy Law. Yet Jesus also came to suffer and die, not for his own sins, but for the sins of the whole world—even for yours.

In his first letter, the apostle John tells us, **"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work...This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him."** (1 John 3:8; 4:9) By his death, Jesus conquered sin and Satan, and then by his resurrection from the dead, he conquered death. Death could not hold him and no longer holds mastery over us. Yet for you to enjoy the blessings of the Father's mercy and the Son's work, God the Holy Spirit had to come.

He had to come into your life through the Gospel in Word and water and meal. He came to bring glory to Jesus by making him known to you as your Savior and to bring glory to the Father by making his love known to you through the Gospel. Amazingly, Jesus promised all of this. **"All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you."** By nature, you can't handle that truth about the Trinity, but by God's grace through the Spirit's work, you can, even as you set aside the hat of reason and stand in awe of the mystery of God!

Through the Word, the **"Spirit of truth"** guides us into all truth—into the truth that we need to know. The Holy Spirit doesn't give us a full explanation of God's essence, but he does show us how the triune God graciously has worked and continues to work for our good through the love of the Father, the deliverance of Jesus Christ, and the Spirit's own life-giving work.

This triune God is bigger and greater than our minds can comprehend—and you know what? That's alright. In the end, isn't that what we're celebrating today? This triune God knows and provides for your needs before you even know them. This triune God rescues you from sin and death and hell at the cost of his own life. This triune God brings you into his family through the life-giving Gospel. What else can we do than praise our truly triune God who has chosen to reveal his truth to sinners like us that we might bask in his glorious grace for all eternity! To him be glory and power and honor forever and ever! Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be and abide with you always. Amen.