

## TRINITY SUNDAY, YEAR B, MAY 23, 2024

Once upon a time, a family of three little pigs had settled down comfortably in their brick house in the suburbs. Years had passed since the crisis with the wolf. Gradually boredom set in. One day, the pigs decided that what they were missing had to do with love, and they determined to go seek love's meaning.

The first little pig went to the university library and read all she could on the subject of love; when she had finished she had learned a great deal about love, but her life was still empty.

The second little pig took another route. He read in the newspaper that a famous pig was coming to town to deliver a series of lectures on the subject of love. He attended all the lectures and was filled with enthusiasm and emotions. The second little pig's high lasted four days, and then his life became pretty much as empty as it had been before.

The third little pig invited two other families over to their house one evening, and all three pigs began to share their life stories, continuing until late at night. They found this so interesting that they agreed to meet together regularly to share experiences and life together. In time, they came to care about each other very deeply. One evening, after all the other families had left, the third little pig said to her siblings: "Now I know what love is; I have experienced it."

The Trinity began as an experience. No one could have gone to the library to research it. Or gone to hear it explained in a lecture – or even found it explicitly mentioned in the Bible. The theological assertion at the heart of Christianity – that we worship one God in trinity of persons – began when unsophisticated, working class folk encountered a man named Jesus. Was he a rabbi? A Prophet? The messiah? The Son of God? Or all of the above? Certainly they did not start out saying that Jesus was God or that God was Jesus.

At first, all they knew was that Jesus was a man who appeared to have the presence of God within him. He spoke with authority, healed the sick, stilled storms, raised the dead. Finally, he died a ghastly death as a refuted seducer of the people only to be raised by the God he proclaimed. So who was he? It would take nearly 400 years for the Church to hammer out the details – that Jesus was fully God and fully human. Nevertheless, it was out of this experience of Jesus, directly with him and with one another as a circle of disciples – that the believing community came to realize that the word God was not adequate to describe the experience of the Holy they had had.

In the end the doctrine of the Trinity proclaims the mystery of God; it does not define it. I would suggest that what it does do, is challenge any understanding of God that we have. Whenever something is said about God as the absolute truth it is a heresy. It is not possible to contain within human language all there is to say about God. Any God that can be captured in human language is not God.

In the final analysis, the Trinity returns to the experience of love. St. Augustine said, "Lest you become discouraged, know that when you love, you know more about who God is than you could ever know with your intellect."

Look at Nicodemus in today's Gospel. Nicodemus was a highly educated man. He was part of the religious and intellectual elite of Palestine. Nicodemus realizes that in this relatively unknown man from Nazareth, there is something special, something holy.

And even though he calls Jesus “rabbi”, Nicodemus probably also knows that Jesus has not been professionally trained. From his point of view, Jesus is just a street preacher with a small band of followers. So rather than risk his reputation by visiting Jesus during the day, when everyone would see him, he visits Jesus by night. This way he can protect his place in society and satisfy his own curiosity at the same time. Nicodemus is a religious and honest man who just wants to make sense of Jesus. How does Jesus fit into what he already knows and understand about the law and the prophets. He knows what scripture says what the promised Messiah will be like and on some level he recognizes that Jesus is special even possibly blessed by God. But he can’t quite fit him into any of his boxes.

This is why Nicodemus comes to see Jesus. He wants to deepen his understanding of him. He wants to engage him in a theological discussion. But Jesus turns the table on him and tells him it is not understanding that he needs but a personal transformation. Jesus doesn’t want to talk theology with Nicodemus rather he wants to point him towards the spiritual. To put it bluntly Nicodemus doesn’t need more knowledge he needs to be touched by the Spirit. He needs to open his heart to God for that’s how he will be reborn. Jesus is telling Nicodemus that what the kingdom of God requires is not right thinking, but the giving of one’s heart and soul. When it comes to having faith, understanding is important. Wrestling with ideas is important, but they cannot stand alone. Faith requires deep personal commitment.

Christian tradition has it that Nicodemus became a devoted follower of the risen Christ, and that he spent his time teaching and spreading the gospel throughout the land. It is said that he was eventually martyred for his faith, and he is considered a Saint of the church. However, faith is more than belief. It is more than the quest for the right ideas about God. Faith means inviting God into your life and opening your heart to the community of God’s inclusive society.

That’s why the Trinitarian formula insists that the nature of God is closer to a loving community than to a lofty individuality. The highest form of existence is communal. God is communal. A choir singing at perfect pitch and in perfect harmony is closer to a definition of God than a lone soloist singing their heart out.

In other words, individualism is the way of limitation, diminishment, and death. Being one with God is about community and fellowship. Growth takes place when we give to others and receive from others; when we know we need them and they need us. It is what the third pig came to realize.

So you see, the doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately a practical doctrine of radical consequences for Christian life. The doctrine of Trinity summarizes what it means to participate in the life of God through Jesus Christ and the Spirit. Ultimately, the essence of the Trinity is God is with us. And when we realize this, life is beautiful.

May the spirit of God restore us to community. May the love of God inspire us to love each other. May the grace of God travel with us so that we can recognize God in each other. Amen.