

Grace Episcopal Church  
Trinity Sunday, 12 June 2022  
Lauds – Morning Prayer  
Rev. Brian C Justice

Proverbs 8.1-4, 22-31  
Psalm 8  
Romans 5.1-5  
John 16.12-15

Being With:  
The Mystery and the Meaning of the Holy Trinity

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In the Name of God:  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

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On this day, Trinity Sunday, we celebrate the mystery and the meaning of God.

And the mystery and the meaning of God is this: “being with.”

The renowned Anglican theologian and vicar of St Martins in the Fields (London) Samuel Wells, argues in his fascinating book, *A Nazareth Manifesto*, that the most important word in Christianity is with.<sup>1</sup>

With is the primary word and is the definitive idea of Christian theology. The whole thing hangs on the word with.

With, not for or of or by or through ... with ... embodies the mystery and the meaning of God and, thus, embodies the mystery and meaning of us and of the world.

Most of the time, I suspect we think of God in terms of for. “God is for justice.” “God is for peace.” “God is for us.” And that is not wrong.

God certainly is for us. But there is an even more fundamental reality that precedes for: with.

God is with us.

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This reality is revealed in the doctrine that is named and celebrated on this day in the liturgical calendar: the Trinity.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Wells, *A Nazareth Manifesto: Being With God*. Wiley-Blackwell: 2015.

Trinity. Tri – Unity. Three In One. Threeness and Oneness at the same time.

What?

According to the laws of mathematics, this cannot be. Something cannot be three and one at the same time. According to the rules of grammar, this cannot be. Something cannot be plural and singular at the same time.

Three in One ... Trinity ... it escapes the restricted realm of logic.

And yet Scripture, Tradition, and Reason reveal a reality that is not contained – or, constrained – within logic, within the laws of mathematics or the rules of grammar.

The Apostles' Creed – which we say today at Morning Prayer – and the Nicene Creed – which we say at Holy Eucharist and on Festivals – provide theological formulations for understanding the mystery and the meaning of God as Trinity.

We affirm in the Creeds that we believe in One God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One Being. Three Persons.

The Father *with* the Son and *with* the Holy Spirit.

The Son *with* the Father and *with* the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit *with* the Father and *with* the Son.

With. Being with.

Why is this important? Why should we care?

What does this have to do with my family?

My friends?

My job?

Gas prices?

Gun violence?

The war in Ukraine?

Summer vacation?

The Bishop's visit here on June 26th?

Everything!

Because the theological formulation of Trinity expresses the deepest, truest reality that there is.

God is not simply unity; God is community. God is not solitary; God is society.

God – Ultimate Reality – is a relational reality.

It is relationship.

It is connection.

The inner life of God is being with.

There is more.

The story of salvation that is narrated in the Bible is the story of being with.

God is with the Israelites in slavery in Egypt, in exile in Babylon, in the Promised Land.  
God is with the people the whole way.

The story of Christ that we re-enact each year in the liturgical calendar is the story of being with.

In Advent we prepare for and in Christmas we celebrate Emmanuel, literally “God with us.”  
In Easter we memorialize and celebrate that God is with us, in suffering, in death, and gloriously, in resurrection.

At Pentecost, we celebrate the Holy Spirit with the community: God is with the Church.

With.

And, still, there is more.

The creation narrative says in Genesis 1 that we are created “in the image of God.” So if God’s being is not only unity but community, not solitary but society, then our being must be community not unity, society not solitary.

Let’s not just blindly accept that or indifferently dismiss that.  
Let’s test that against our own experience.

What is the nature of *my* being? Who am I?

When I begin to address that question, I am overwhelmed at the answers ...

I am a deacon because I am *with* Grace Episcopal Church.

I am a husband because I am *with* my wife.

I am a father because I am *with* my daughter and my son.

I am a friend because I am *with* a friend.

I am a teacher because I am *with* a student.

I am a citizen because I am *with* this nation.

So ...

I am not a solitary reality. I am not an abstraction, an isolated unit, a disembodied being.

I am who I am because of you.

I am who I am with you.

I am who I am in relationship to those persons, those places, those things with me.

I am who I am with God.

If we follow this theology further, we see that, in fact, *everything* is like this.

Look the bulletin for today's service. It is a piece of paper.

Where does that paper come from?

A tree.

Where does the tree come from?

A seed.

What does the seed require to grow into a tree?

Soil, sun, clouds, rain, heat, light, air, space.

And for the tree to become paper ...

The lumberjack, the truck, the mill, the machinery.

For the paper to be at all, all of those things have to be with each other, or else there is no paper.

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The Trinity ... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That sublime mystery of our faith.

It does not mean there are three things on top of that cloud: an old man, a young man, and Caspar the Friendly Ghost floating around them.

That is an anthropomorphic projection.

That is our imagination reducing metaphysical reality to physical form.

That is what the cartoonist would draw on the paper because that is all that can be drawn.

But that is not what Trinity means.

What it does mean is that ultimate reality – God – Being – is relationship, is being with.

The reality of God is communal. And our reality is communal, too.

So, being a Christian is not merely an individual act of “believing something” ...

Being a Christian is being with the living God who is with us already.

Being a Christian is being with the whole communion of saints, living and dead, who are here, now on the adventure with us.

We are all in it together. It's communal. It's being with.

And thank God ... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ... for that.

Amen.