

Trinity Sunday

May 22, 2016

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31 Wisdom, Sarah, existed from before creation.

Romans 5:1-5 God's love has been poured into our hearts, through the Holy Spirit.

John 16:12-15 Jesus taught that the Spirit will guide us into all truth.

Today we celebrate not an event in Jesus' life, but a doctrine of our faith as Christians. But our goal is to live a deeply heartfelt faith. So today I want to talk with you about this very mind-centered concept of a Triune God, and what that has to do with our having heart-centered faith. The concept of our God being Trinitarian is unique to Christianity. It took our forbearers until the year 325 to write the Nicene Creed which claimed it, and then into the sixth century for the Athanasian Creed to clarify it. These works came out of the need to explain as fully as possible the ways God is known and experienced.

I grew up knowing the Old Testament God much better than I knew the New Testament God. This was mostly the God of creation, of great power, and it seemed to me, who got angry pretty often, and things didn't go well for the human beings who instilled the anger.

This was only one dimension of our God, but I am just sharing with you that my image as a young man was most clearly of the God who creates and punishes.

When Jesus was finally understood to be who he said he was, the Son of God, and in fact one with God, that led to the need to understand what that says, or what that changes about my understanding of God.

While Jesus was with the disciples, they were constantly turning to him to solve their problems and meet their needs. At his ascension, he charged them to carry on his work in the world; and promised that they could turn to the Holy Spirit – who would be at work WITHIN THEM – to find God's presence and guidance.

This brings two changes to our understanding of God; that now there are these three experiences we have of God, and that this changes our experience of how God relates to us.

We know God to the extent that we see God's actions in the creating and sustaining (the on-going creation) of the universe. We also see God's actions as we study and recall the character and miracles and the teaching of Jesus Christ. We also see God's actions as we experience within ourselves - and within each other - the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

By my looking at these three ways of experiencing God in my life, that has changed my relationship with God. It has deepened my awareness of God's actions in the daily events of my life. It has made God's imminence real to me. I learned a long time ago that God is both transcendent and imminent. That doesn't quite fit

human logic, but it completely fits the model of our doctrine that God is One, and at the same time God is Triune. Triune = relatedness.

In the first three turbulent centuries of the Christian Church, as people were trying to use finite human logic to describe our infinite God, there were attempts at describing God that missed the mark – badly.

One was called ‘modalism’, the belief that God is One, but took on different ‘modes’ of existence when relating to the world.

One was called ‘subordinationism’, the belief that the Son and the Holy Spirit were ‘derived from God,’ and so were ‘lesser’, ‘subordinate’ in glory and majesty to the Creator Father.

Another is called ‘tritheism’, the belief that there were in fact ‘three gods’ present somehow in the Trinity.

But what we acknowledge today, on Trinity Sunday, is the belief that our God is One God, transcendent; and at the same time our God is Triune, imminent; and through that Triune nature of our God, there is a character of inter-relatedness that defines God, and defines our relationship with God. Since Jesus described that the Holy Spirit lives in us, we have been made partners in this interrelatedness of the persons of the Trinity.

Okay, it gets complicated to get our heads around this concept of a Trinitarian God. But through these three experiences we can all relate to, of God’s presence in our life, there is a deeper personal relationship that has been communicated and offered.

For the Old Testament Jews, they worshipped the same God we do, but their understanding was of the One God. As Christians, we have been given the gift of a three-dimensional relationship with our God. These facets of awareness of God give us three ways to see God, to pray to God, to walk with God, to love God, and to be grateful to God. For me, the point to setting aside a day to commemorate the Trinity is not to fully explain the Trinity, or to feel that we need to. We quickly reach the conclusion that finite human logic is not going to fully capture the nature of the working relationship we have with God. It is something to simply choose, to experience, and to celebrate. Amen.