

John 16:12-15

Today we celebrate a festival day in the church
Pastor Erik did such a great job of introducing the church year to our children last
Sunday

- pointing out how various colors of the year
- red for Pentecost
- pay attention next week

Today we celebrate a different festival

- and the color has changed to white

It's not the celebration of an important event in the life of Jesus

- not his birth
- not his resurrection
- not even his baptism

It's not the celebration of the giving of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church

- that was what we celebrated last week
- Pentecost

Today we celebrate a doctrine

- the doctrine of the Trinity

I know that doesn't sound very exciting

In fact, whenever I say the word "doctrine"

- I can see people's eyes begin to glaze over

But stay with me for a while this morning

Doctrines are important to us

Theology is just an organized way of thinking about God and faith

So before you start to nod off in order to avoid my sermon on doctrine

- let me make a case for the importance of talking about the doctrine of the Trinity this morning

One of the very basic doctrines of the Christian faith is the doctrine of the Trinity

It is a belief that is a part of all Christian denominations

It is included in all of the Christian Creeds

It is really foundational for the Christian faith

The word trinity means quite simply three in one

It describes the fact that God has three persons

- while remaining only one God

While God is one
 --God has three persons
 That is hard for us to understand
 --because in our experience as human beings
 --we each have just one person
 But God is far greater than we are
 God can be a single entity
 --and still be three persons

We experience God in three different persons

First, there is God the Creator
 The One who is responsible for the universe
 The One who is the basis, the ground of all that exists

Second, there is God the Redeemer
 We know him as Jesus the Christ
 The One who came to this earth to redeem humankind of our sinfulness
 The One who showed us the very nature of God by living here as a human being
 The One who makes it possible for us to have a relationship with God

Third, there is God the Spirit
 The One who calls us to believe and enables us to believe
 The One who Sustains us in our faith
 This is the person of the Trinity that we celebrated last Sunday
 --the holy spirit of God
 --who dwells within us
 --and sustains our faith

Of course, trying to understand the Trinity is quite difficult
 But that should not be surprising, because God is much greater than us
 We will never be able to comprehend the nature of God
 So we use metaphors for God
 We call God a shepherd
 --and that tells us something about the nature and care of God
 We call God a mighty fortress
 --and that tells us something about the power and might of God
 Jesus even refers to God as a mother hen
 --who gathers her chicks around her and protects them
 The Bible is full of illustrations about God
 But, of course, none of them tell the whole story
 None of them completely describe or explain God
 All of our names and concepts for God fall short

One of the images we use for God is Father
 For many people that is a beautiful image of a father who loves and provides and cares
 for his children

For many other people, however, the image of father is much less comforting
 In fact, for many people the image of a father is far from one of love

Also, for many people the concept that God is a male is a disturbing concept
 Surely there is no reason to limit God to being a male

There are references to God in the Bible as male

But there are also reference to God displaying female characteristics

We shouldn't limit God to one gender

God is male

God is female

God is not a male

God is not a female

I know

I sound like I am speaking gibberish

But that's what happens when humans try to define and categorize God

That just shows the limitation of using a metaphor for God

Each metaphor has its pitfalls

No human words can adequately communicate God

At some point we have to admit that we as humans are unable to figure God out

It would be like a plant trying to figure out the thinking and actions of a human being

We can't do it

We must accept the fact that God is far beyond us and our puny capacity for
 understanding the universe

It may surprise you to hear that the word *Trinity* does not occur in the Bible

How can something be so important that isn't even in the Bible?

Well, the truth is

--while the word Trinity is not in the Bible

--the concept of the Trinity is

Many passages of the Bible refer to the three persons of God

--all in the same passage

Our Reading this morning from Romans 5 speaks about

--God

--Jesus Christ

--and the Holy Spirit

While they are all God

--they are three distinct persons

But not three gods

--only one God

Likewise in our Gospel for today Jesus refers to his Father and also to the Spirit who will come after him

While Jesus talks about God, his father, as separate from himself

--Jesus also says that he and the Father are one

So the doctrine of the trinity is well grounded in the Bible

Here is one way to think about this idea of God as

--one God

--but three persons

Many years ago actors would assume different roles in a play

That way a limited number of actors could present a larger play

The actor needed to distinguish which character he was playing

--and he did so by wearing a mask

Each character in the play would be indicated by a specific mask

These masks were called "personas"

An actor might wear the persona of

--farmer

--businessman

--and even a woman

One actor would play many different personas

That is another way to think of God

God is only one

But God comes to us in different personas

God plays different roles in our lives

Just as an actor might play different characters in a play

So, too, God comes to us in different ways

Again, this is just another human illustration

If it helps you to conceptualize the Trinity – Great

If not, don't make use of it

Just like the illustration I shared with the children this morning

The clover

--is one leaf

--and yet it has three leaves

That's just another attempt at explaining Trinity

Well, I hope that you do not have a headache by now as we have been talking about
the doctrine of the Trinity
It is a difficult concept for us to comprehend

Martin Luther said:

*To try to deny the Trinity endangers your salvation, to try to comprehend the Trinity
endangers your sanity.*

Maybe the most important lesson we can learn from the doctrine of the Trinity is that
God is great

Greater than anything we can even imagine

God has power and abilities and thoughts that we cannot even conceive of

God is so far beyond us that we pale into insignificance in God's presence

But

And this is the most important thing of all

This great and mighty God

--loves you and me

This God who is far beyond our understanding

--cares about what happens in your life and mine

Isn't that truly amazing?

We might be tiny and insignificant in the grand scheme of things in the universe

But God listens to our prayers and is concerned about our lives

What a gift

That we have such a great God who loves us

And what do we have to offer in return to God?

Our love

We can love God

And that means also loving all the creatures that God has made

We show our love for God by loving other people

We show our love for God by serving other people

Do you remember the last thing that Jesus told his followers to do?

The very last instruction Jesus gave them?

It was to love

Love each other

Love even their enemies

That is how we are supposed to respond to God's unimaginable love for us

In the early years of Christianity it was well known how loving the Christians were
Whenever there was any kind of disaster in the Roman Empire

- Earthquake
- Famine
- Plague

Christians were there to help out
--sending aid and assistance

So much was this the case that a Roman historian, who was not a Christian, wrote
about them: *See how the Christians love each other*

That's what those Christians were known for

How are we doing?

How have we, the church of Jesus Christ, done in obeying his last instruction?

I am afraid we have fallen short

--we have a long way to go

I'm not sure that **love** is the word most non-Christians would use to describe Christians
today

Too many times, Love is not the image that Christians are projecting today

Don't feel bad if you have trouble understanding the doctrine of the Trinity

The church has struggled throughout its history to define and explain it

Perhaps the best we can do is to acknowledge that God is greater than we are

--in many respects, beyond our understanding

And yet God who is beyond our understanding is not beyond caring about us and our
lives

The Triune God loves you

So, in praise of God we sang together:

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!

Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.

Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

**May the grace of Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with you all, on this Trinity Sunday and
forever. Amen.**