



Sunday
26th May, 2024

Trinity Sunday

Living in the love of the Triune God

Breaking Open the Word

TRINITY SUNDAY
2024
Liturgical Year B



Prepared by
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St Peter's by the Lake

Paynesville, Victoria Australia
Anglican Diocese of Gippsland



READINGS

Isaiah 6.1-8
Psalm 29
Romans 8.12-17
John 3.1-17



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Summary



“

And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13.13 NRSV-A

”

In the article “Living in the Love of the Triune God,” the writer delves into the challenges of discussing the Trinity, outlining historical heresies and controversies. While acknowledging the complexity and potential for heresy, it stresses the importance of seeking a clear understanding of the Trinity. Despite various attempts to explain the Trinity through analogies and human experience, the writer asserts that the Trinity remains a divine mystery beyond complete comprehension. Encouraging humility and openness, the article underscores the centrality of love within the Triune God, emphasising the ultimate unity and love that define the Trinity.

INTRODUCTION

In the article, “Living in the Love of the Triune God,” Dennis tackles the challenging subject of the Trinity, acknowledging its complexities and the numerous controversies that can trap novice and seasoned clergy.

In addressing common trepidations around discussing the Trinity in church, including the fear of misinterpretation or heresy, Dennis humorously points out fine theological distinctions that have led to severe schisms in church history, yet also emphasises the Trinity’s enduring ability to ordain blessings.

The article discusses how the Trinity has been portrayed, from a divine dance to likening it to water’s states. However, Dennis concedes that no explanation can genuinely encapsulate the concept of the Trinity.

He further counters claims that the Trinity implies the existence of three separate gods, emphasising the idea of one God expressed in three persons instead. Dennis advocates for a humble acceptance of the Trinity as a divine mystery beyond human comprehension.

He concludes by referencing Jesus’s unity with God the Father and the symbolism of love conveyed through faith, hope, and love in the Trinity. Though the Trinity remains elusive to our current understanding, Dennis reassures believers that all will be revealed at the end of time.

Overall, the article suggests an accepting approach to the Trinity’s mystery and complexity, highlighting the importance of acknowledging the love within the Triune God.



Keywords

Love	heresy
Triune	faith
controversies	hope



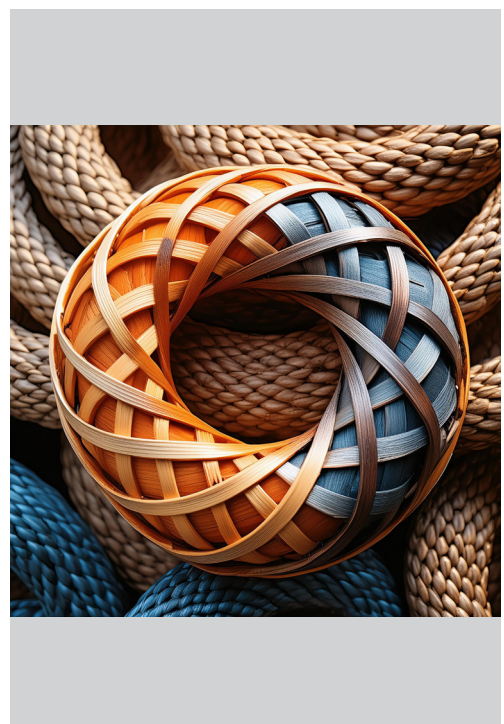
Contemplation

mystery	constant
incomprehensible	through, with, in
changeless	unity



Integration

faith, hope, love	Father, Son, Holy Spirit
thought, word and deed	



This week, an article, not a sermon!

Living in the Love of the Triune God: A Trinitarian Reflection on 1 Corinthians 13



This Sunday, due to the Session of Synod of the Diocese, I will not be offering a sermon. It is commonly joked that preaching on Trinity Sunday is the one sermon a year that places many clergy in dread. From my experience, this is different for me. Stewardship Sunday does, especially after one of my supervising Vicars was required by his Parish Council to justify the living they give him. This would hardly be 'good news' for the Vicar, his family, and the spread of the Gospel regarding evangelism!

Trinity Sunday, a feast to a concept, is when the Church takes stock of the most debated positions or points of faith. It has had many Synods dedicated to it. Some Bishops have been sentenced to exile, laicised (defrocked), executed or discredited. Bishop Nicholas Klaus, the original Santa Klaus, broke the nose of another bishop at one such Bishop. With the Archbishop visiting the Diocese this weekend, as a Synod, we hope for a more gentle theatre of debate!

One of the pitfalls that many experience concerning preaching about the Trinity is to be accused of heresy. Let's face it – it is quickly done! Most of the significant heresies are traps for the unwary and, sometimes, experienced clergy. Titles such as modalism, Sabellianism, Arianism, tritheism, Docetism, Pelagianism, and many more '-isms' are trotted out and revised annually by the preacher who considers themselves to be unlucky enough to score this one Sunday on the preaching roster! An old joke about the Athanasian Creed also appears, emphasising that the entire concept of the Trinity, like the Creed itself, is incomprehensible.

So, why do some in the Church worry? To be clear, most people in the pews are not concerned. All they want to hear is someone make sense of the concept of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, one God, three persons, of one substance and being. In one Synod, including a single letter in one word, "iota", resulted in one

of the first significant schisms of the modern Church. Not giving 'one iota' may seem minor, but it was enough to see the East and West Church be rendered asunder. Thankfully, the undivided and most glorious Trinity continues to bless them.

I've heard so many different ways of explaining how the Trinity works, and to be blunt, most of them would easily be shown to be heretical. Ontological and Immanent Trinity is another recent topic that makes people wonder. Economic or not, it reduces God to functions depending on whether or not God is acting as "Creator, Redeemer, or Sanctifier." Already, I'm reaching for the definition of 'modalism' as wonder that those who use the immanent and economic Trinity in blessings based on being inclusive and gender neutral are committing an act of heresy.

Then, some preach some order of precedence of the Trinity. That would be Arianism. The Jehovah's Witnesses would fall into this trap by pointing to the lack of a definite article before the word God in the Hymn to the Word, meaning that by default, the word is a god' not 'the God'. Sadly, such an argument overlooks the reality of this being high poetry or hymn writing in which, like examples in contemporary literature, takes licence with grammatically correct forms.

Other denominations will home in on a literal verse that does indeed state "...that by the name of Jesus you will be saved" (see Acts 4.11) and no other. However, relying on one verse taken out of context or finding other verses to aid the argument, for example, Jesus being the Way, Truth, and Life, fails quickly because of the lack of context. The bible wasn't written in chapter and verse, and reading the collection of books in that narrow manner is not overly helpful or informative.

So, what of the Trinity would I be saying this Sunday if I were asked to preach?

I've used images such as a dance of the three persons, fallen into the trap of modalism, or even



functionalism at times. I've tried to explain the state of grace in the reality of water being solid, fluid and gas, even pointing out the PowerPoint "Active, Neutral and Earth" to try and get there. A rope is finally woven to make one solid, practical, strong entity. All of them fall short. I've been attempting to assign roles of humans to God, but that immediately falls short as well, as we are made in the image of God, not God in the image of humans. My Muslim friends scolded me for being a believer in three gods. I argue that this is incorrect, and immediately, they try to see that God is three persons, blessed Trinity!

It is a mystery. It is a concept. God is God. Jesus points out that he and God are the same. You've seen me, you've seen the Father. Cue the heresy of denying the Trinity by excluding the Holy Spirit! God is love. God is expressed as Paul writes to the community in Corinth in faith, hope, and love—these three. And the greatest is love. Be careful there, Paul. If they are all equal, one should not be more significant. But the point is there. It is all about three.

The perfection of three is a reason to say that the teaching of Jesus called Christ is the path I chose to follow. I believe in the presence of God that transcends my human understanding, and I also can see how others struggle to define what is

correctly stated by Athanasius as undefinable (or incomprehensible). Do I know the power of God as the Ancient of Days seated on the throne? Maybe. Or maybe I will see an ordinary Arab walking the banks of the Sea of Galilee, calling fishermen to leave everything behind and follow him.

I hear the power of love being spoken with and through other people.

At the end of time, then will I know. As I journey through life, my thoughts, like Paul's eyes, grow dim, and I seem to be in the dark. But then, I will also see clearly when my days on the earth are over.

Do I believe in the Trinity?

Absolutely, but please, do not ask me to define God.

SMALL GROUP
ICEBREAKER!

**WHAT'S THE MOST
CREATIVE OR UNUSUAL
THING YOU'VE EVER
DONE TO AVOID A
CONVERSATION ABOUT
THE WEATHER?**



**“Do I believe in the
Trinity?**

**Absolutely, but please, do
not ask me to define God.**

”



GROUP DISCUSSION

Question 1

Why do you think understanding the concept of the Trinity is complex and challenging, and does it matter that we need to comprehend it fully?

Question 2

How have people tried to explain the Trinity, and why do they fall short?

Context

Dennis encourages us to focus on the love expressed within the Triune God rather than getting lost in trying to define or understand it.

Application

How has experiencing God's love in your own life shaped your understanding of the Trinity, or how do you wish it to?

Context

In the article, the writer acknowledges the complexity of understanding the Trinity and says it surpasses human understanding.

Application

How can embracing the mystery of the Trinity help us grow in our faith and our relationship with God?

Context

Dennis mentions different attempts, such as the dance of three persons or the analogy of water in other states, but admits they are insufficient.

Application

How do these attempts at explaining the Trinity influence our perception of God and how we relate to him?

Question 3

How can focusing on the love of the Triune God help us navigate through the complexities and mysteries surrounding the Trinity?

Question 4

How can we respond to misunderstandings about the Trinity, such as the belief that it implies three gods?

Context

The article mentions interactions with Muslim friends and emphasises that believing in the Trinity does not imply three gods. God is expressed as three persons in one.

Application

How can we converse respectfully with people of other faiths about the Trinity to clarify misunderstandings?

Context

The article reminds us of the unity between Jesus and the Father and that the most significant expression of God's love is through faith, hope, and love.

Application

How can we express and share this love with others daily?

Question 5

Considering Jesus' unity with the Father (John 14:9) and Paul's words to the Corinthians that God is love (1 Corinthians 13:13), how can we apply these scriptures to our lives?

Further Reading

Andrew's Version

Substack Article: <https://abmcg.substack.com/p/the-mystery-of-the-trinity-the-spirit>

R.C. Sproul: What's the Difference between the Ontological and the Economic Trinity?
<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/whats-difference-between-ontological-and-economic-trinity>

Rahner, K Karl Rahner's Trinitarian Axiom: 'The Economic Trinity is the Immanent Trinity and Vice Versa as critiqued by Dennis W. Jowers, Karl Rahner's Trinitarian Axiom: 'The Economic Trinity is the Immanent Trinity and Vice Versa.' New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006





Prayer Points

Please pray for

Pray for each person to understand the concept of the Trinity and embrace the mystery and complexity with humility and open-mindedness.

2. Ask God to help us apply the sermon's message of love expressed within the Triune God to our daily lives, showing love to others through our faith, hope, and actions.

3. Pray for God's guidance in deepening our relationship with him, seeking to know Him more fully and tangibly experiencing his love.

4. Ask for the Holy Spirit's empowerment to live out the truth of the Trinity, recognising that just as Jesus reflected the Father, we are called to reflect the love of the Triune God to those around us.

Acknowledgements

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