

The Trinity on Father's Day

So, again the preacher faces a decision. Just as on Mother's Day, he must make a decision. Does he preach on fathers because it's Father's Day, or does he preach on The Holy Trinity because it is the Festival of the Holy Trinity?

Well, let's see.....Father's Day is a worthy celebration; fathers deserve recognition, as do mothers, on at least one day every year. But.....it's not really a church holiday; it's really a secular observance.

Holy Trinity, on the other hand, is a church observance; in fact, it has been observed since the 10th Century, so it has a much longer history than Father's Day, which has only been observed in the United States since 1910 and only became an official holiday in America in 1972.

Then, too, Father's Day only has significance for you if you were blessed with a good father, or, in a time when an increasing number of children are being raised without a fatherly presence in their lives, it only has significance if you had any father at all.

So, it seems as if the Trinity has the bulk of argument on its side. However, there are some significant theological points that can be made around the concept of fathers, so let's see if we can do justice to both.

Regarding the Holy Trinity, we need to first acknowledge that, while it is one of the most important doctrines taught in Scripture, the word never appears. But it is nevertheless undeniably taught in Scripture. From the mouth of Jesus, the reality of the Trinity is voiced, as when He says in the Great Commission: “Go, therefore,, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit....” – the doctrine of the Trinity.

Paul, in his letters, several times gives voice to the reality of the three persons in one God of the Trinity, without ever calling God “the Holy Trinity”.

The bulk of evidence in Scripture can lead to no other conclusion than that this God of which the Scripture speaks so clearly and eloquently is one God in three Persons. Not three Gods, but one God, yet who reveals Himself to us in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

To say it is a mystery is to state the obvious. No human mind, other than Jesus Himself, has ever fully understood it, nor ever will. It is a completely unique entity, like which there is no other.

Martin Luther said it well, ““To try to deny the Trinity endangers your salvation, to try to comprehend the Trinity endangers your sanity.”

Many analogies and comparisons have been suggested over the centuries to help us grow in our understanding of this teaching – and that is all we can hope for in this life, to continue to grow in our understanding of the Trinity while recognizing that this side of heaven we will never comprehend it completely. Comparisons have been made to an apple, which has skin, fruit, and seeds, all of which are of the essence of “apple” but each of which is unique.

Or the sun, which provides light, heat, and energy.

Or a human hand, which is comprised of a palm, four fingers, and a thumb, each of which is distinctly of the essence of “hand”, but each of which is different.

However, these are just aids to help our limited human intellect deal with a concept which is essentially beyond our understanding.

There is an ancient story about St. Augustine. One day he took a break from writing about the Trinity to take a walk along the seashore. There he came across a child with a little pail, intently scooping up a pail full of water out of the ocean, then walking up the beach and dumping it out into the sand, then going back down to scoop out another pail of water to pour into the sand, etc.

Augustine asked the child what he was doing, and the child explained that he was “emptying the sea out into the sand.”

When the Bishop tried to gently point out the absurd impossibility of this task, the child replied, “Ah, but I’ll drain the sea before you understand the Trinity.”

But that’s okay. The Bible never demands that we understand everything it teaches; only that we accept it by faith.

I do that everyday. I don’t understand why, when I turn a switch on the wall down here, a light comes on up there. Oh, I understand about electricity, and incandescence, and the flow of electrical current. I can describe the process in an elemental way, but I don’t understand *why* it happens that way, i.e., why electrons flow in a certain direction and not in another.

I accept that my wife loves me because she demonstrates it in a hundred ways everyday, but despite the fact that in August we will have been married 40 years, I still don’t understand *why* she loves me.

The Trinity is important to us as a teaching of Scripture, as a doctrine of the Church – and every true Christian denomination accepts the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. It is a foundational teaching of the Holy Christian Church; any so-called Christian church which does not accept it and teach it is not a truly Christian church.

It is important to us; it is not a throw-away teaching. It is foundational to our faith, not only because it is clearly taught in the Bible, but also because it is important to us.

In the doctrine of the Trinity, we see the most important attributes of God described:

When we speak of the Father, we think of the creative power. We are reminded that God is the source of all power, that all power belongs to Him and through His power He brought the universe into existence simply by speaking His Word. In the Father we see the grace of God. It is the only explanation for why He chose to save us from our sins rather than just erasing mankind as a bad job and starting over from scratch. In His grace we see God's love and mercy for sinners, that peculiar love called agape which loves without cause or demand for love in return.

In the Son, we see the love of God made concrete, rather, made flesh. We see in Jesus, the Son of God, the embodiment of God's love, the lengths to which He was willing to go to save us from the folly of our own rebelliousness, at the very moment when we wanted nothing to do with Him. In the death and resurrection of Jesus we see a sacrificial love the like of which has never been seen, nor will ever be seen again. And in the Resurrection of Jesus, we see again the incomprehensible power of God who is stronger even than sin, death, and Satan. In His gracious offer of forgiveness and eternal life as a free gift through faith in Jesus, we see that agape love which gives and loves and expects nothing but trust.

In the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, perhaps the least understood and most neglected member of the Trinity, we see God's determination to seek us and find us, and, having found us, not to let us go. The Spirit is given at our Baptism and He remains our constant companion, our continual Comfort, our ever-present Strength.

Finally, the doctrine of the Triune God is important to us because it is a constant and continual reminder to us that WE ARE NOT GOD, and will never be. It reminds us that God is not some super-powerful grandfatherly figure in the sky, who looks a lot like us. Rather, God is as someone once described Him, "The Wholly Other" – that's "W-H-O-L-L-Y Other". I like that description because of the play on the word "holy", but also because it tells us that God is different from us, so different that we will never comprehend Him completely in this life. Granted, Jesus is a Man to this moment, but He is also divine, and as I say that, I do not fully understand what that means. But I need to be reminded that God is not like us. It keeps me from falling into the trap of thinking that He thinks like me, or that He is subject to the same faults and failures that are part of my reality. It affirms to me that He is above all the stuff of earth at the same time that He lived here among us and knows what it is to be one of us, because He is – and at the same time He's not. See what I mean? Incomprehensible. And that's okay. That's more than okay, it's essential, because I don't need a God who is like me in every way; neither do I need a God who I understand completely. I need God

just as He is: more powerful than the challenges I face; more loving than my rebellion against Him; able to love me even when I don't love myself; able to see something in me worth saving.

Oh, I promised you something about Father's Day. The obvious linkage to the Holy Trinity is in God the Father. Here's a little story that reminds us fathers of the most important thing about being a father. It's from "A Curious Community" by Amy Butler:

"Thomas Troeger, a Presbyterian pastor and gifted preacher, tells a story of an experience he had once. He wrote:

"One day several years ago I was in a department store buying myself a new shirt when a complete stranger walked up to me and said, 'You must be Henry Troeger's son.'

"I looked at this person and I said, 'I don't believe I have ever seen you.'

"He said, 'Oh, no, you have never met me at all, but a long time ago I worked with your father. I was a close colleague of his and when I saw you across the aisle of the store, I said to myself, 'I'd know that face anywhere.' You are the very image of your father.'

"For several weeks after that, I would sometimes be going down the street, and maybe come around a corner, and catch my reflection in a store window. I started to see myself with the eyes of someone else. It is not like looking into the mirror in the

morning. I would come around the corner, catch that reflection and I would think, 'That's Henry Troeger.' All of a sudden I would be seeing how I bore the image of my father."

And so it is with us".

And so it is with all of us. We each bear the imprint of the Triune God, the imprint of our heavenly Father. We carry that imprint into every area of our lives.

I would suggest to all of us who are dads – biological, step, half, foster, adoptive, grandfathers, great-grandfathers, and Godfathers – that the most important place we bear that imprint, the absolutely most crucial place we bring that imprint to bear is in our interactions with our children. In a certain sense, they are looking to us to see what God is like. Don't let that go to your head, and don't try to use that on your wife the next time she asks you to take the trash out, but take it very seriously. You and your children's mother stand in the place of God to your children.

And dads, because God has chosen the father/child relationship to describe His relationship to us, your child's perception of God will be formed to a certain degree by his or her perception of you. Whenever they confess, "I believe in God the Father Almighty" their understanding of what that means will be shaped to some extent by what you showed them of a father's love and care, or failed to show them.

So give thanks to God for making you a father and accept the privilege and responsibility that go along with it. In all your dealings with your children show them the imprint of the Father, God the Father, in you.

And now, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be and abide with you all.