

## I. Extended Set Up by Campus Pastors

A. I want to take a moment to explain why we've been doing this mini-series – Special Days – and why we are profiling Trinity Sunday. It's a bit out of character for us. We are not a liturgical church. With the exception of Advent and Lent – Christmas and Easter – we do not pay a lot of attention to the church calendar. Why suddenly make a big deal out of Pentecost and Trinity Sunday?

B. This is a bit of an audible. And so I wondered myself. I think it grows out of all of the reading I have been doing about the future, which makes me look back for anchors.

1. Every field has a lunatic fringe. The field of Future Studies has a big fringe. Some secular writers about tomorrow seem to just make things up. They appear grounded in very little. But others frame things historically.

2. Both Winston Churchill and Peter Drucker are credited with saying that if you want to know the future, study the past. And the further ahead you want to look, the further back you have to study. (I doubt either said it, but I do think it's true).

3. And I further believe that the past can be a helpful anchor. We often think of anchors as bad things. They can be. They can be dead weight. But if you ever spent the night on a sailboat in a bay crowded with sailboats, you know that everything hinged on setting the anchor so that in the middle of the night you didn't drift into the rocks or another boat.

C. If we let it, knowing what happened in the past can be really helpful for the present.

D. The challenge is, we do not the way we think today. We are chronological snobs – we think we are better than those who went before us. Smarter.

1. We think newer is better. There was a time when new was considered bad because it was untested. Today our default assumption is that newer is better.

2. And we are historically illiterate. Few of us are as aggressive as Henry Ford, who famously said, "History is bunk." But many of us live that way.

E. Early in my study of the future – for the fall series – I ran across a quote that has been attributed to

F. All of that to say, we need to be anchored to the past. Not held back by it. But not oblivious to it. That is why we profiled Pentecost Sunday last week and Trinity Sunday this week.

1. Last week we noted that fifty days after Passover was a holiday called Pentecost, and on that day 2,000 years ago the Holy Spirit showed up.
2. And what was set in motion with the Tower or Babel back in Genesis was temporarily overcome when everyone could understand everyone else.
3. And that is a foreshadowing of what heaven will be like – the vision we get in Revelation 5.

G. There is value in rehearsing all of that on Pentecost Sunday. And there is value today in focusing on the Trinity.

1. Just so you know, a focus on the Trinity is mostly a focus on Jesus. Because those who deny the Trinity are ultimately saying, Jesus isn't God.
2. So I want us to look at why the Trinity is important and how it matters to us today.

H. And here is how I tie this altogether. There was a big controversy about the Trinity back in the fourth century. And at that time – before the printing press, before TV or radio, before you could Tweet things out or post a blog – people would often try to communicate things with songs.

I. And one of the songs written to defend the Trinity – it was a fight song sang by the Christians to try to shout down those who said Jesus was a good man but not God.

J. The song is known as the *Gloria Patri* – which is Latin for Glory to the Father, which is the first line. But it's really about Glory to the Son.

1. You may know it.
  - a) Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. World without End. Amen
2. When it's sung today it's pretty sedate. At the time it was written it was an "in your face" battle cry. It was a chant repeated by the Christians who were trying to shout down those who said Jesus wasn't fully God.
3. We don't know the tune, but we know the focus. It was:
  - a) Glory to the Father, AND TO THE SON! AND TO THE SPIRIT!  
THEY ARE ALSO GOD!

b) As it was in the beginning – JESUS IS ETERNAL. THERE WAS NEVER A DAY BEFORE JESUS. HE IS FROM ETERNITY PAST.

c) As it was from the beginning, is how and ever shall be – HE WILL ALWAYS BE GOD

K. The image that accompanies the words is an icon – one of the pictures used in the Orthodox Church as a prayer aid. We do not use icons. As Protestants we get very nervous about any efforts to represent God

1. This image is one of the most famous icons of all times.

2. It was painted – although you do not say it that way. You say that icons are written. But it was painted in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and it represents the scene where Jesus appears to Abraham back in Genesis 18.

3. There were three angels – and the understanding is that:

a) The left angel symbolizes God the Father. He blesses the cup.

b) Jesus is in the center. He is in purple because he is royal

c) The Holy Spirit is wearing green – the color of life – and is a bit wispy

4. They are shown in unity.

L. There is a lot of symbolism here. Let's watch this.

## II. Introduction

A. So there are reasons to look backward for anchors that tether us to truth and important moments and events. Why would the Trinity be one of them? Why set aside one Sunday to focus on the idea that God is one and God is three when:

1. It sounds like bad math and the word Trinity isn't even in the Bible

2. Aren't there more pressing things to think about – like how can I get along with my wife (or husband) or Mom. Or where can I find peace. Or, I really need a job.

B. I actually think the Trinity provides insights on those things – answers with real weight to them, but they emerge as added benefits from taking a deeper look at God.

III. Let me set this up by noting that at the end of this service I am going to invite you to stand and join with me in reciting the Athanasian Creed, which is one of big ones.

A. The creeds are quick summaries of important claims related to certain key issues

1. The Apostle's Creed is a bit unique, not because it was written by the Apostles. It wasn't. It came about later than that, but because it was the first quick summary of the Christian faith. And it wasn't written to resolve a controversy but to give us the non-negotiables that needed to be affirmed for someone to be baptized. They were affirming certain key ideas. Christianity is not whatever we want it to be. You are free to believe whatever you want, but you can't call that Christianity. The Apostle's Creed was a quick summary of key points, although even then it was in response to other ideas.

a) There is a line that says, "I believe in the resurrection of the body." Many think that this is a statement saying, "I believe Jesus rose from the dead." But it is not. It is a statement – meant to counter the Gnostics who were hanging out around the church, the guys who had read too much Plato and thought the body was bad. It is a statement that we will have new physical bodies.

B. Creeds tend to be written in response to controversies. And they don't tell us exactly what we have to affirm. They are silent about most things, but they establish the outer boundaries. That is the idea behind FencePosts.

C. There are three big creeds after the Apostle's Creed: The Nicene, The Athanasian and the Chalcedonian. In a sense these are all about the Trinity because they affirm the idea that Jesus is fully God.

1. The Nicene Creed was written in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century at the Council of Nicaea, which was Constantine's summer home. The leaders of the church got together for the first time and along with setting a date for Easter and agreeing on the books in the New Testament, they adopted this creed to put an end to the ideas being advanced by Arius who claimed that Jesus was a good teacher, great example, moral reformer and had a very special relationship with God the Father, but he was not fully God. The Nicene Creed says, "Oh yes He is."

2. The Athanasian Creed is round two of the same fight. Athanasius was the guy who kept after all of those who wanted to find ways to say, "Jesus is really, really, really good, wonderful wise and god-like, worthy of worship, but not fully equal to the Father." We are going to recite it in a second and you will see how odd some of the language is because they are shutting down every end run people were making.

3. The Chalcedonian creed was written in the mid-fifth century to counter the idea that Jesus was fully God but not fully human.

D. Collectively they want us to be sure we get Jesus right.

IV. So, we the early church affirmed the creeds to protect the Trinity. And they set aside a specific day – Trinity Sunday – to highlight it. But why? Why did they think this was so important?

A. Number One: It is a statement that Jesus is God.

B. Number Two: Because it is what the Bible affirms.

1. In Luke 3 we read about Jesus's baptism and we have a great Trinitarian moment. He comes up out of the water and the Holy Spirit descends on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." So at that one moment you have one God in three persons on display

2. In the Great Commission – Mt 28:18, Jesus says: All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth, go therefore and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of (please note the singular case – name, not names) in the name of the Father, Son and HS.

3. In 2 Cor. 13:14 – Paul's benediction in that letter – where he ends: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and fellowship in the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

4. There is not a single verse where we read that God is one God in three persons, but we see it as one of the central truths of the Bible. The Old Testament made it clear that there is only one God. The New Testament made it clear that Jesus is God. A careful reading of the Bible makes it clear that God has one essence but three persona.

C. Number Three: The Trinity is important because it tells us things about ourselves – such as the fact that we were made for relationships.

1. You were made in the image of God who has never been alone.
2. When we come into His presence, we join a loving, perfect, joy-filled and glorious relationship. We are invited to a party. I do not mean to be flippant here. I am trying to make a profound point.
3. God is not a solitary being. He exists in the perfect, loving fellowship of himself. Which is important to note because it makes it clear that we are not here because we are needed, but because we are loved.

a) Please understand – God does not need you or me. He does not need to be loved, because he already is. Nor does he need someone to love. He is not lonely. We do not complete him.

b) My contention here is that while it might initially seem like a good idea to be needed by God. I think it would become a bit scary over time.

(1) When I was about ten my best friend's grandmother – Nana – moved in with them. She was delightful. She was friendly, kind and loved to bake.

(2) In fact, I used to love to have lunch with Steve b/c his grand-mother would lavish us with food. And she'd make these little pies for us to eat.

(3) I thought it was great. Steve grew to hate it. To my shock I'd hear him say, "I don't want you to make me more pies. I just want to be left alone." She overwhelmed him.

c) I can imagine a scenario in which the attention of a God who needed to love was overwhelming. But that is not the situation we are in.

d) Because God is Triune he does not need us in order to be complete.

e) In the beginning there was not "the solitude of One, but the communion of three divine persons." We are adopted into that family. We are invited to that banquet. We are allowed to reside in the glow of that eternal friendship.

4. And this helps us realize that we were made for relationships. We cannot go it alone. There is a reason why one of the worst things that can be done to someone is to put them in solitary confinement.

D. So, the Trinity is important because: 1) it reminds us that Jesus is God; 2) it is what the Bible teaches; 3) It helps us understand ourselves – we were made to be in relationships with others. Number four: The Trinity teaches us something about what it looks like to be a good friend.

1. What we see in the Trinity is a focus on the other. The Son submits to the Father. The Father exalts the Son, and the Spirit, which proceeds from both, points to both.

2. Think about this for just a second.

a) Though Jesus is equal to the Father, He submits to his Father's will. That is what we see in the Garden on the night of his betrayal. "Not my will, but yours be done."

(1) In Phil 2 we are told that Christ did not consider equality with his father something to be held onto. He decided not to demand his rights. And then we are told that our attitude should be like His. "Humble yourself. Exalt others."

3. And oh by the way, what does the Father do? Jesus is deferring to the Father. And – same Phil 2 passage – we are told that:

a) Therefore God exalted him (Jesus) to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord

4. I could go on in this vein. God the Father gives all authority to Christ.

a) And every time one of them speaks of the other it is loving.

b) Christ always exalts the Father when he speaks about Him

c) When the Father speaks to the Son – audibly from heaven – it is to say that he loves him and is pleased with him.

d) And the Spirit exalts Christ.

5. We can learn about how to live from God's triune nature.

6. A number of years ago a book came out called The Shack. I commented on it at the time because everyone was reading it and because it was pretty controversial.

- a) There are parts of the book I really like, but there were also parts I really do not.
- b) If you are not familiar with the book, it is a novel, written to help those who have suffered a deep loss understand how God could allow evil to exist.
- c) The protagonist - a middle aged father named Mack – is going through the motions of following God when his youngest daughter, Missy, is kidnapped and horribly murdered.
- d) He blames God and falls into a depression –the Great Sadness – until he is invited by God to meet at the shack where Missy was killed.
- e) He goes not knowing what to expect, and ends up spending the weekend with God, who exists in 3 persons: the Father is represented as an African American woman named Papa, Jesus is a Middle-Eastern carpenter and the Holy Spirit is an wispy Asian female.
  - (1) In Luke 15 – Christ portrays God as a shepherd, then as a peasant woman and finally as a Father. So, there is biblical precedent for asking people to think about God in different ways. And others have done it. C.S. Lewis depicts Jesus as a lion in The Chronicles of Narnia. This is one of the parts of the book that make people nervous.
- f) Young takes some risks that are risky. And I think he gets some things flat wrong. So, I am not endorsing it. But there are some really good things about it.
- g) In addition to appreciating his desire to persuade people that God can be trusted even when everything appears to be going wrong. I appreciate his emphasis on the Trinity – in particular, the way the 3 persons of the god-head love each other completely, enjoy each other’s company and give themselves to the other two in a perfect way.
- h) There is a warmth there

E. There are other heady theological truths that emerge out of our study of the Trinity.

1. The Triune nature of God means that God is both transcendent and imminent. He is both gloriously above us – far removed from us and in our.
2. His triune nature means that he can be both loving and just at the same time. His mercy and wrath do not compete with one another.
3. This is why we are Trinitarians not Unitarians.
4. This is why we baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
5. This is why you are often sent out under a Trinitarian benediction.
6. This is why I have suggested you adapt the Trinitarian prayer I start my day with. It's included again in my notes on line.<sup>i</sup>

V. Let me end my sermon by inviting you to join with me in this Trinitarian Creed. I am going to turn things back to the campus pastors in one minute. Let me say in closing that:

A. This is a long creed because it reads a bit like a legal document. It is spelling things out as specifically as possible to make it as tight as possible. And this isn't something we chose to say every week. But there are times when it's a good idea to realize that we are standing alongside people who have carried the flag before us for 2000 years. We are anchored in a good sense.

---

<sup>i</sup> Good morning, heavenly Father; good morning, Lord Jesus; good morning, Holy Spirit. Heavenly Father, I worship you as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Lord Jesus, I worship you, Savior and Lord of the world. Holy Spirit, I worship you, Sanctifier of the people of God. Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Heavenly Father, I pray that I may live this day in your presence and please you more and more. Lord Jesus, I pray that this day I may take up my cross and follow you. Holy Spirit, I pray that this day you will fill me with yourself and cause your fruit to ripen in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Holy, blessed, and glorious Trinity, three persons in one God, have mercy upon me. Amen.