



ST. MARK'S ON THE CAMPUS

Episcopal Church

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The Rev. Gretchen Naugle
Sermon for the 1st Sunday after Pentecost, Trinity Sunday
St. Mark's on the Campus
June 3rd, 2007

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Psalm 8; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

In the name of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

Today is a day of both beginnings and endings. To name just a few -- our public schools are ending another year and our universities have already finished the spring semester. Some of our faithful here at St. Marks' have already left town and I'm sure others will be in the near future – including Sidnie and Dan!

This is the last Sunday we will have the choir with us up there in the balcony leading our singing in such a powerful way. For the summer months, they will be seated among us in the pews and keeping the rest of us on pitch as best they can!

This is also the last Sunday for quite a while we will use a variety of colors for our paraments and vestments. And unless I've overlooked something significant -- after this week it will be green, green, and more green for all Sundays -- until the first Sunday in November – and you thought RED was the preferred color in Nebraska?

Then, in a month we will welcome into our midst Ryan Hall as our curate. And as you have probably already noted, Ryan will be ordained as a transitional deacon a week from tomorrow at 7 p.m. at Holy Spirit in Bellevue. I plan to be there and I hope that many of you will be, also.

And today is certainly a significant day in the Church year – and a bit unusual one, as well. For unlike all of our other feast days, today we do NOT celebrate an event or remember a person. This is the Sunday each year when we focus on a fundamental Christian doctrine – one God revealed to us in three different ways – and we usually use the word “Trinity” to describe that basic belief. We all began our life as Christians in baptism. With water and the words “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” we were washed clean with water.

Last Sunday when we celebrated the Feast of the Pentecost – we affirmed once again our own baptism – just as we do each year at the Easter Vigil. We began by using the words of the Apostles' Creed with its three parts -- “I believe in God, I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, I believe in God, the Holy Spirit”, and then we felt real water sprinkled on our bodies!

Those few, yet all-powerful words coupled with water are so very important to express who and whose we are - a child of God and a member of God's family. Quite often, in both our liturgy and our personal prayer life we find ourselves **using** Trinitarian language – we refer to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet if we try to explain what the Trinity really means to ourselves or to another person we struggle a bit – especially **WHY** we use **THREE** different names for **ONE** God!

Now each of us has our own distinctive combination of names – first are the names usually two given to us when we were born –and these names are restated when we were baptized and so are often referred to as our Christian names. Then we have our **last** name, the one coming from our family of origin and for some of us that last name changed at some point because of marriage or perhaps for other reasons.

But for each one of us, our names are usually ours alone and unique – although many of us like to tell stories of finding our “name twin” in a most unusual way. For instance, just try searching your own name on the Internet sometime! So as we begin to realize that God has three names: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or perhaps the more “politically correct” equivalent: Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

We admit the whole idea that **ONE** God comes with **THREE** labels tends to rearrange our “mental theological furniture” in a big way! By giving names however to the three persons of the Trinity can help us to understand the three separate and discrete functions that God has in our lives. God as the Father, the Creator, is the one who gives us, and all living things, life itself, but also is the one who nurtures us and cares for us in a most special way – similar to what our human parents are called to do.

By calling Jesus as God the Son, our Redeemer, our Savior communicates to us who and what the **person of Jesus**, the **human** expression of God, means to us – for it is the completely human nature of Jesus that forgives our sins as only another person can do. Yet God in Jesus as our Lord and Savior has also a completely divine nature. By his human death on the cross **AND** his divine resurrection three days later that God in Jesus gives to us our salvation as a free gift – no strings attached-- along with the promise of life everlasting with God.

The third person of the Trinity God the Holy Spirit is also known as the Paraclete, or the Advocate -- and is perhaps the most difficult to understand. In the reading from John's Gospel that we just heard, it is the Spirit that completes the picture we have of God in our lives. It is through the presence of the Holy Spirit that we experience God and God's love in our everyday lives.

Each one of us has likely had some sense of God being present with us in one way or other and quite possibly, more than once in our lives. For some it may be the very real, tangible, and even palpable sensation of the Holy Spirit alive and at work in our lives. For others of us it may be simply the sense of guidance and direction of someone, some presence beyond ourselves – hard to explain in words and yet very real at the times it happens. One way we often try to explain this presence of the Holy Spirit is to simply shrug it off and say “It is a God thing”!!

So if we put all of that together: God the Father, the Creator - God the Son, the Savior - God the Spirit, the Abiding Presence, the Comforter, we can begin to get a glimpse of the Holy Trinity: God in three persons truly is – as we humans, as we Christians try to explain who and what having one God means in our lives. Each one of our lessons today also gives us some further understanding of the full nature of God. Our hymns this morning also help us to comprehend the three-fold nature of God. Our processional hymn, a long-time favorite of mine, uses the phrase more than once “God in three persons, blessed Trinity”, as well as the threefold expression “Holy, holy, holy” that we also sing each Sunday as the Sanctus during the Eucharistic Prayer. Our sequence hymn, that we just sang, has a separate verse devoted to each person of the Trinity with the last verse ending with “To thee, great one in three – and to all eternity, love and adore”.

And so we conclude as we began -- “In the name of God -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

Amen