

May the Sacrament of the Word and the hunger of our hearts meet and lead us ever more deeply into God. Amen.

Trinity Sunday. This is the only day of the church year that calls us to ponder a teaching of the church rather than a teaching of Jesus.

The Trinity is not a biblical concept. Let me say that again. The concept of the Trinity is not one found anywhere in scripture.

Early in the life of the followers of Jesus, the powers that set the rules decided that they needed to really define what made one a Christian and what did not. Men of God wanted to control what the flock believed. The concept of “doctrine” was born.

When the word “Trinity” was first used to describe God, it did NOT refer to “one God, three persons”, it referred to the plurality of the one God: *together* with his Son and his Spirit. They were a threesome, not a triune God. And each member of this triumvirate was NOT considered to be equally divine.

Was the Son pre-existing? Was the Father the origin, and Jesus and the Spirit born of the first God? Was the Spirit there at the beginning—say as Wisdom—or did the Spirit come afterward, from both the Father and the Son?

It was like the religious version of “Which came first, the chicken or the egg?”

Then the notion of “Trinity” we are more familiar with was developed. It revolved around the Latin word *homoousios*. God is three persons in one nature or substance.

This understanding of the Trinity came from the language of the theater and referred to masks worn by actors in their roles on stage. One mask for hero, one for son, one for villain—you get the idea. One actor: many masks.

So, the thought went that the three persons of the Trinity are basically three different characterizations of one dynamic actor: the one God.

And then we get to St. Augustine. St. Augustine...Augustine was an influential writer, bishop and theologian who decided to take on this doctrine of Trinity. It took Augustine 15 books to fully talk about the Trinity, and it took over a decade to write these books. So don't feel weird if you can't really figure out the theological gymnastics in the Trinity.

Early on in his massive treatise, Augustine made seven statements about God: The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. The Son is not the Father. The Father is not the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the Son. And then, after these six statements, Augustine adds one more. There is only one God.

Got that?

Finally, St. Patrick came along and used the shamrock to teach about the Trinity. To him, the shamrock spoke of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It was a primitive way of teaching, but really, if you think about it—has anyone ever really improved on it?

It took hundreds of years and much bloodshed for the Church to decide on the official doctrine of Trinity. I think I'll take a pass on reading it to you—because it is similarly obfuscating.

Now, for some people, Trinity really works, this concept of God. It helps them synthesize all the ways they meet God in their lives: sometimes as the Creator of all that is. Sometimes as the Power that unexpectedly gives them insights or the strength to go on when they have reached the end of their ropes. Sometimes as Jesus the human being, who loved every single person he met with the same unwavering capacity.

All of these personas come together in one Trinity. A trinity with specific names attached to it: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That Trinity is so important to some churches that they insist that all things in the church need to be done in those names, in that order—for our prayers, blessings, and sacraments to work.

See how important man-made constructs become to us after a while?

But God is more than doctrine, more than words used to describe God. Probably even more than the concept of Trinity.

Think about it.

I met a man in an ER one night when I brought my spouse to the hospital. He was a very friendly person, a great doctor, and respectful of my spouse when other doctors can be deliberately unaccommodating. So-- this doctor was marked highly in my book.

Then I realized he was a husband, and father of two amazing kids. Now I knew him as three things: a doctor and a father and a husband. Now wouldn't it be ridiculous if those were the only three ways that person could ever appear to people in his life? Of course, it would be. He probably has at least 3 dozen ways he manifests himself to people, including as "son", "colleague", "friend" ---and a member of this community of faith.

Benjy is complex, and when I discover new features of who he is, my appreciation for him deepens. Doesn't it stand to reason that God – who is infinite—has infinitely more facets, some I've probably never even seen?

God is not bound by our perceptions. God is only bound by what we are willing to perceive.

We do ourselves a disservice by always insisting that the way a few men thought about God nearly 2000 years ago is the only way to think about God, the only way to think about Jesus, the only way to think about the Spirit. God urges us to think bigger. We could begin by letting God out of the "doctrine box", which was decided on when men thought that the world was flat.

Tradition is good, but so is change.

If we bind ourselves to only what others have learned in the past, we will never see God in the present or the future.

Instead of celebrating a small word used to describe God, let's instead celebrate the one God—who comes to us in many forms, who continually surprises us with all sorts of guises and personas.

We need to open our hearts and our minds. We need to think bigger. God is bigger, Jesus is bigger, the Spirit is bigger, WE are bigger than we can even imagine. God does not want to keep our understanding small and controllable; God wants to unleash us to possibility and wonder.

Amen.