

**“The Truth of the Trinity”**  
**John 16:5-15 (esp. 12-15)**  
**By John Gill**

Last Sunday was a special day, the third most sacred celebration in the church year, Pentecost Sunday. (Only Easter and Christmas are considered more sacred). Pentecost Sunday is the day the Church celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit, falling afresh upon those timid and frightened disciples of Jesus, transforming them into bold and fearless apostles of the Gospel, firing them up, ready to go-out and win the world for Jesus! It is considered, “the birthday of the Church.” Our Pentecost Sunday this year was especially meaningful because we had the joy of Confirming four of our youth! Yes, the Holy Spirit is still very much at work reviving the Church!

Today is also a special day in the Christian calendar – Trinity Sunday. Why do you suppose Trinity Sunday immediately follows Pentecost in the Church calendar? I imagine – to make sure we fully understand the central role the Holy Spirit plays in our faith. Let me explain:

Many people hear the story of the first Pentecost in the second chapter of Acts about the giving of the Holy Spirit to the church – and make the mistaken assumption that this Holy Spirit is something new – that the Spirit didn’t exist before that day. Maybe that’s understandable – after all, we spend months every year retelling the story of how God the Father sent his Son into the world in the person of Jesus, who taught us about God, suffered and died for the sin of the world, and was resurrected – making eternal life possible for you and me. Then, we spend only one Sunday focusing on the Holy Spirit – and move on, as if Pentecost is just an afterthought. We worship God as Father, and revere God as Son, but barely give God as Spirit a passing glance. But the Bible is clear – the Holy Spirit is not some new thing God concocted – some afterthought of God.

Trinity Sunday reminds us that our One God is also somehow Three – “God in three Persons,” the Three in One, or the Holy Trinity. In some mysterious way our God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit simultaneously – because they all are aspects of the One God. Does that sound confusing? That’s because it is. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t true.

There have been many attempts throughout the history of the Christian faith to try to describe just how the Trinity works – how precisely is God three yet One? Are the Son and Holy Spirit part of God or did they spring from the Godhead at a later time? Are the three equal in importance, or is God the Father supreme? Or is the Doctrine of the Trinity itself mistaken, and God truly is One, and Jesus and the Holy Spirit are not part of the Godhead at all? As you can imagine, many who have attempted to describe the Trinity have been declared heretics, because their explanation didn’t square with Holy Scripture. In fact, the Nicene Creed, that we will be reciting at the close of this message, was developed as an attempt to declare once and for all how we as Christians are to understand the Trinitarian nature of God. But even the Nicene Creed’s effort to describe the correct and orthodox understanding of the Trinity is hard to grasp.

Yes, when you get right down to it, the Trinity is quite the mystery. Trinity Sunday is the one day in the Church year that forces us to try to wrap our minds around this Mystery.

The word “trinity” is not used in the scriptures, but evidence of the triune nature of our God is all throughout the Bible. We don’t have time to do a study of all the places in God’s word that we see

evidence of the Trinity – you might undertake that in your own devotions. Of course, as already mentioned, we see the Trinity in the story of the first Pentecost in the Book of Acts. But I believe the book of the Bible that best explains the Trinity is The Gospel of John. In fact, the more I study John's Gospel, the more I'm convinced that the primary purpose John wrote his Gospel is to reveal the Truth of the Trinity!

Of course, God the Father, the first Person of the Trinity, is a given – everyone agrees on that. But, according to John, how are we to think about God the Son and God the Holy Spirit?

You've heard me say that John's Gospel is unique among the four Gospels included in the New Testament. The first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke – often referred to as "The Synoptic Gospels") are very similar to one another – so much so that scholars think they draw from the same body of stories about the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. But, John gives us a completely unique perspective on the meaning of Christ's coming into the world. Almost nothing in John is found in the first three Gospels, and visa versa. And John's approach is much more "theological" – In the way he tells the story of Jesus, he wants us to also understand what Christ's coming into the world MEANS. He uses symbols and metaphors to describe Jesus – Jesus is the Bread from Heaven, the Living Water, the Good Shepherd, The Gate, The Way, the Truth and the Life – and so forth. And in John, Jesus doesn't perform "miracles," he performs "signs" – actions that point to these deeper Truths about who Jesus is. All throughout his writings, John makes sure we know that the earthly "Jesus" of his Gospel is also the Divine Christ, who comes FROM the Father, yes – but who also is ONE WITH the Father. The Jesus of John's Gospel says plainly, "The Father and I are one," and you can't get more direct than that!

When it comes to the second and third Persons of the Trinity, John uses special words - two metaphors – two Greek concepts that help us understand the relationship between the three Persons of the Godhead.

The primary metaphor John chooses to describe God the Son is THE WORD – in Greek "Logos."

We see this in the very first few verses of John's Gospel. Unlike the first three Gospels that begin with stories of Jesus' birth or with his baptism, John launches into his Gospel with a theological affirmation – his introduction to his Gospel deliberately echoes the first verses of Genesis – Listen to how John introduces us to Jesus:

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people."*

John makes it clear in his introduction to the Gospel that this "Jesus" he will be telling us about is actually the pre-existent Christ – present as part of the Godhead when the universe was created. Christ, God's perfect Word, was the creating force. Just as in the Book of Genesis, this Word "speaks" all creation into being, giving us life. And since this Word gave us life in the first place, he is able to give us a new eternal Life! This second Person of the Trinity is the perfect expression of the Father's revelation – God's LOGOS - the very "Word" of God. John is telling us - the "Jesus," whose story he is about to recount is more than a mortal man or even The Messiah God sent to fulfill Jewish prophecy. Jesus is the very image of God himself – If we want to see God, look at Jesus, the perfect image of God. If we want to hear God, listen to Jesus, God's very Word.

John states this theological Truth very clearly in the third chapter of his Gospel, when he reports Jesus's own words:

*"No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*

So, according to John, it's clear that the Godhead includes co-equal "Persons" – God as Father, and God as Son – God's perfect "Word."

But how does John make the case that the Holy Spirit is a third co-equal "Person?" The key is in the metaphor John uses to describe the Spirit. Did you notice from the reading of the scripture a few moments ago? Let me remind you:

*"When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the Truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."*

The Holy Spirit, according to John, is "The Spirit of Truth." This Truth is conveyed from God the Father – spoken by God the Son – and then testified to by God the Holy Spirit. No verses in scripture more succinctly explain the Trinity than these!

According to John, the Holy Spirit IS God's way of conveying "Truth" to us.

For John, this Truth is key to understanding the Christian faith. He would have us wrestle with the same question he put on the lips of Pontius Pilate, when Pilate asked Jesus at his trial, "What is Truth?"

So, what IS this "Truth" that God goes to so much trouble to convey to us? Throughout John's Gospel, Jesus tells us the answer over and over. In fact, "Truth" is a word that pops up 25 times in John's Gospel – here is just a sampling:

- *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of Grace and Truth..."*
- *You are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the Truth that I heard from God...*
- *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life...*
- *Whoever lives by the Truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God...*
- *A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth...*
- *I will ask the Father, and he will give another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of Truth... You know him for he lives with you, and will be in you.*
- *Father, sanctify them (my disciples of all generations) by the Truth; your Word is Truth...*
- *If you hold to my Logos (my teaching), you are really my disciples. Then you will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free...*

So, obviously this “Truth” that the Gospel of John wants us to accept is more than how we typically think of the concept of “truth.” Yes, it is a distinction between what is true from what is false – but it is a much more profound concept than that.

The “truth” that can “live with us” and “is in us” and “sanctifies us” – this “truth” that “sets us free” is nothing less than the Truth about God the Father’s love for us, demonstrated in the life, teachings, suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection of God the Son. It is the Gospel of Grace. It is the Good News of Salvation. It is the amazing Truth that we are of infinite worth to God. And when we accept the Truth of God’s love for us that has been revealed in God’s gift of our redemption through Christ, we are set free to live the new and abundant life God desires for us!

The Jesus of John’s Gospel is telling us that the Holy Spirit is “Spirit of this Truth” – this third Person of the Trinity is God’s prevenient grace at work in our hearts, wooing us and inviting us to accept the Truth of the saving work of God’s Son, so we can be set free from our sins and live a new life in Christ! As I said, the Spirit of Truth testifies to the Truth – about Jesus!

So, while our feeble attempts to explain the mystery of the Trinity will always fall short, we can still affirm this doctrine as essential to our faith, because the Trinity is the mechanism God has chosen to reveal the Truth of God’s love and grace to the world. Actually, only a Trinitarian God could reach-out to save us and empower us to live the abundant life God desires for us.

That means that the Trinity is not some static academic theory. It is a dynamic reality – three essential aspects of God’s nature, constantly in dialogue, on the move, working in concert to invite us into a relationship with God through faith in Jesus.

In fact, I think the most helpful way to think of the Trinity is that the Father, Son, and Spirit are engaged in an eternal “dance” – a dance of Love. Clayton Harrington gave this helpful description:

“Picture a circle dance in which members join hands and slowly begin to spin about the room, each maintaining their own identity, but becoming inseparably part of the dance that is taking place. The Triune God is an eternal circle dance of the Father, Son, and Spirit. In this dance, the three divine persons of the One God have loved one another and been in relationship with one another for all eternity. Through this never-ending dance, ‘the divine persons exist so intimately with one another, for one another, and in one another, that they constitute a single, unique, and complete unity by themselves.’”<sup>1</sup>

So, the three Persons of the Trinity are engaged in an eternal dance of love. And the Good News of the Trinity is that you and I are invited to join the Dance of God – to be swept up in the love that exists between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So, on this Trinity Sunday, we can either affirm the Truth the Spirit is revealing to us – we can say “yes” to the invitation to join the Dance of Love, and know the joy of fellowship with God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Or, we can turn our back on the Truth – we can refuse to Dance, and miss our opportunity for salvation. The choice is ours.

St Catherine of Siena was a Christian Mystic who lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. She wrote of the divine invitation to dance in her collection of poetry, entitled The Hymns of the Earth.

*"I won't take no for an answer,'  
God began to say to me  
when He opened His arms each night  
wanting us to dance."*

My Friends, on this Trinity Sunday, this is "the Truth." The Triune God: Father, Son, and Spirit – are dancing! And God is opening his arms to you, inviting you to Dance.

Don't be a wall-flower. Why not join God's Eternal Dance of Love!

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

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Now, let us stand and affirm our faith in the Triune God, using the words of the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God,  
the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father;  
through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.

For our sake  
he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven  
and is seated  
at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead,

and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
- who proceeds  
from the Father and the Son,  
- who, with the Father and the Son  
is worshiped and glorified,  
- who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in  
one holy catholic\* and apostolic church.

We acknowledge one baptism  
for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

\* meaning "universal"