

John 3:1-17

There was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?”

“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 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.

Sermon on John 3:1-17
Pentecost 1, Year B
Trinity Sunday

Let us pray:

Holy God, help us this day to bind ourselves to you. Be with us this moment - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - as we patiently await your Kingdom.

-AMEN

Sermon:

These days there's always a lot of chatter about Jesus.

Folks call on Jesus to fix every disaster,
every wrong turn.

Jesus is at football games, and he's on bumper stickers.

He's on tee-shirts. *I hear that sometimes he's even at church!*

I'm OK with that. I love Jesus. And I know that Jesus loves us.ⁱ

Even though the world is hung up on Jesus,

*Today is Trinity Sunday. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*ⁱⁱ

How do we know there's such a thing as the Holy Trinity?

Around 100 CE Jesus, St. John wrote that:

“...God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...”

John called the God's Son “Jesus”, *and* Jesus called God, “Father”.

That's two of the Big Three of the Holy Trinity! .

And in John's Gospel, Jesus says:

“...no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born

Of water and Spirit.”

So, that's The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit!ⁱⁱⁱ

John's Gospel is 3-for-3.

One God. Three persons. *And three personalities.*^{iv}

The Holy Trinity is a bit of a mystery. ^v

But, as the Dali Lama said,

“The Holy Trinity is at the heart of reality!”

I think so. I think that he's right.

In the mid-1970's, back in my hair days, I lived off of

Coffee, cigarettes and sourdough bread,

in San Francisco and Bezerkeley.

For a while I studied in a group led by a lady named Jannabai.^{vi}

We waded through a lot of stuff.

Some good stuff and some nonsense.

Jannabai taught us about the enneagram,^{vii} and the *rule of threes*.^{viii}

I was a recovering Catholic High-school seminarian back then.

It was easy to connect with the rule of threes.

I mean, how Trinitarian!

Somehow, I figured out that the seminary lessons on the Trinity,

Apply not only in heaven, but also on earth.

The Trinity is how God works, in heaven *and* on earth.

Each person in the Holy Trinity works perfectly with the others,

All day, every day,

to save us, to heal us, to build God's Kingdom,

and finally to bring us home.

The Trinity really isn't about human perfectibility^{ix}....

It's about how we to live more completely, and more fully --
right here and right now.

One people, one humanity, one community.

The Trinity points towards God, and away from ourselves.

The Trinity points towards God, and
away from our collective sin ...

The Trinity points towards God, and

away from the Marketplace's hyper-individualism ...

The Trinity points us away from the world of I - Me - Mine,
That says each person for himself.

The Trinity is about US and about our Kingdom work to reveal

God's being presence in the World.

Through the Trinity

- God the Father calls each of us;
- God the Son heals all of us, and
- God the Holy Spirit encourages us ...

To bring God's message of love, of peace, of shelter and forgiveness,
to a world gone cold and dark and lonely and sad. ^x

Jesus said:

“When two... are gathered, there I will be also.”

Jesus is here right now! *Can't you feel him here?*

Christianity is not a spectator sport.

God call us from the stands to the center of the ball field.

We're at the 50-yard line. *Almost in field goal range!*

Even when we struggle, God want us in the game!

God calls each of us to join the team,

To work with others, and to play our role.

* Jesus calls us to fling open the doors of our church and our lives.

* The Father calls us to commit – to the Kingdom's great work.

* The Holy Spirit calls us to talk less and to listen more,

to love more. To forgive more. To be more.

One people. One church. One Kingdom.

AMEN

ⁱ But Jesus isn't a perpetual Divine Go Fund Me page. He does expect us to look after each other. He does expect us to do some of the heavy lifting.

ⁱⁱ Sounds like it's three guys. Some folks say the Holy Spirit is more feminine. Is God really bound by our notions of gender? Are we trying to make God fit our expectations? Is that how God works?

ⁱⁱⁱ The story seems staged to me. Nicodemus was a top tier well educated person in his day. He and others in his social class had heard lots of strange ideas, and the way he stumbled over the "born again" phrase seems stilted to me. It's not to say that John didn't tell Truth, but since the early gospels were read aloud to a mostly illiterate crowd, they would have appreciated a story telling aspect, especially if it tended to ground a big shot! It seems to me that today's Good News was written to be read to an unsophisticated crowd.

^{iv} One-in-three. Three-in-one. So, is God like a three-legged stool? It only works with all three legs.

^v Although we tend to reflexively accept the Trinity as Truth, the theological development of that understanding took many centuries. How do the three persons we call "God" work? That question began to be sorted out through the Arian controversy (ca. 256–336). As it turned out, a "presbyter" named Arius, taught that the "Son" was a person created by God, the Father, in time, rather than outside of time. This became controversial because, although Arius' teaching was, an older but not rejected theological tradition, the approach necessarily meant that the created "Son" was subordinate to the non-created Father. Others saw the Son as being eternal as God the Father was understood to be, and The Son of the same substance as the Father. Arius' supporters did not see the Son is such a light.

In 325 CE, Emperor Constantine called a council of bishops, who decreed that Father and Son were *homoousios* (ὁμοούσιος, of the same substance or essence) and the Arians Church people being what they are, the arguments over the meaning of the Greek word "ousia", continued; by the Council of Constantinople (381 CE), bishop Athanasius' an anti-subordinationist reading, had the upper hand so that homoousios began to be seen as Father and Son not merely similar beings, but more like one being.

What about the “Holy Spirit”? The Spirit may or may not have been seen as homoousios with the Father and Son, but it was, as we still say, “worshiped and glorified” with them. See our Nice Creed, “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.”

^{vi} Her given name was Nancy Dannenberg.

^{vii} This is now sort of well known.

^{viii} You hear my words, my thoughts, and my voice. The idea in the Rule of Threes is that, for every moment and every event, there are three tensions in play. The Thesis, the Anti-Thesis and the Synthesis. It’s an intricate dance that we usually don’t notice.

But even if we don’t see them those three forces work, they are there! With a patient and careful eye you can see them.

^{ix} Only God is perfect...

^x St. Patrick’s “Breastplate”, 447 CE. In 477 AD St. Patrick prayed: "I bind to myself today the strong power of ... the Trinity Creator of the universe". The Trinity is more ancient than Creation. The Trinity is mirrored in creation. St. Patrick’s shamrock had 3 leaves, but it was one plant. A campfire has flame, heat, and light, but it’s just one campfire. We are mind, body, and soul, but we work best when are one person.