

Trinity Sunday, Year C - June 12, 2022
"Grace, Love, and Fellowship"
ST. THOMAS' EPISCOPAL CHURCH
ST. PETERSBURG, FL

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



I've probably given somewhere between 10-12 Trinity Sunday sermons now over the course of my almost sixteen years of ordained ministry, by which I mean I've preached on Trinity Sunday that many times and have probably given about three actual sermons. I'm sure that within each of those, vengeful theologians would be able to identify and call out where I fell into heresy. This day, above all other days, that seems easy to do. I'll probably do it again today, so I apologize in advance. It's just that, for being a central doctrine of our faith, the doctrine of the Trinity is really hard to get right. The fact that there are seventeen known Trinitarian heresies out there, and that doesn't count the vast number of heresies that broadly fall under the umbrella of Gnosticism, ought to tell you, at the very least, that people have been struggling with this for millennia. Now while I'm sure y'all might delight in hearing about the errors of the pneumatomachians, or the fallacy propagated by the eutychians, or the downright bizarre beliefs of the collyridians, I'm not

going to do that today. I am, perhaps as an example to us all in this modern age, going to rely upon a Canadian to work my way through this.

Well, alright, he was a Brit, but he taught for a long time in Toronto, so that still counts for something. In a sermon delivered on Trinity Sunday in 1888, the Rev. Edwin Hatch explored the great Trinitarian blessing St. Paul deploys in 2 Corinthians 13. Those of you who have been to Morning Prayer will recognize it: *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”* He begins by remarking that it’s incredible that one of the most explicit recognitions of the Holy Trinity to appear in the New Testament comes to us in the form of a blessing. This tells us, he wrote, that *“the revelation of the Trinity is a revelation not of an object, but of a living truth. It recalls us from metaphysics to life. It reminds us that in our world of effort and failure we need the varied help of God. It reveals to us that God, who in his Trinity of Persons is very near to us, is near to us with a Trinity of blessings.”*

That got me thinking. The first thing it put me in mind of was a question I was once asked by a priest who was teaching about the Holy

Spirit. They asked, “How often do you address the Holy Spirit in your prayers?” I think in the context in which the question was asked the answer was universally, “not much.” In conjunction with what Hatch said about the benediction, I thought of how I pray to each of the Divine Persons, and, as we go along, I want to invite you to do the same.

I think in my prayers I address God the Father most often, but, if I’m being honest, I think this has more to do with a spiritual laziness than anything else. It’s just too easy to start a prayer, “Dear God,” or “O God,” or something like that. Beyond that, the deeper I explore my feelings about this, I arrive at the conclusion that I address prayers to God the Father most often when I am offering a prayer about the created order, about the grandeur of the cosmos, about the terror of the inconceivable, in a cry for righteousness, and in pleas for knowledge. Let me invite you to ponder how you pray to God the Father and to see if you can put some names to the types of prayers you address to the First Person of the Trinity. It’s an interesting exercise. What it comes down to for Hatch is that when the world is seemingly spinning out of control, we know that God the Father loves us, loves us as a parent loves their child, loves us unconditionally and

in an “infinitely greater degree, but in some way like the way we love our children.” As John wrote in his letter, “God is love.” St. Augustine confirms this when he explores the concept of the Trinity and arrives at identifying the First Person as the “Lover.” God, in the First Person of the Trinity, comes to us as love, and in this benediction, we are given a form to pass on that love to others in a blessing.

I address prayers to Jesus frequently, but perhaps not as frequently as the First Person. Sometimes I’ll just start talking to God and somewhere in the middle of it I’ll realize that what I’m really doing is having a conversation with Jesus, and so when I’m done with my part, I’ll conclude it by saying, “in your name I pray. Amen.” I think when I do that, I do it because I am in need of a relational God, God who I can understand somewhat and who can fully understand me, God who was once like me in all ways but one. I need to be known. And so I talk to Jesus. How, and why, do you talk with Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity? Hatch says the benediction of the Second Person comes first in Paul’s formula because Christ seems to be nearer to us. Further, he says the benediction of the Second Person is “grace” because that single word encapsulates everything

Christ did for us: from redemption to atonement, from the knowledge of God to the hope for eternal life. It is all grace.

Lastly, I think on the Spirit, that effervescent and inimitable Third Person of the Trinity, to whom I address very few prayers. I address so few prayers to the Spirit that I cannot even come up with a cogent list of typical topics as I've done for the other two Persons. One thing this tells me is I need to pray to her who is my Advocate and Comforter more often. How often do you pray to the Spirit? Perhaps this is also your invitation on this Trinity Sunday. Hatch tells us that in Paul's benediction formula, the blessing of the Spirit is one of fellowship and communion because she is teaching us to be a fellowship of goodness, a fellowship that never rests with what is good enough but instead always strives to be better. He says, "if it were given to me to pray for one benediction more than another, for one form of Divine fellowship more than another, I should pray for this benediction and the fellowship of spiritual growth. I should pray, if I had but one thing to pray for, not for the activity of knowledge (though I value knowledge), not for the activity of doing good, but for the activity of spiritual growth. I should pray that my light might, by the help of God, so

shine before [all] that they might glorify our Father who is in heaven. I should pray for this because it gathers up all else into itself.”

I hope that this exploration of the Holy Trinity through the lens of prayer has opened some new window through which you may glimpse the Divine Persons. I hope that this gives rise to some new avenues of prayer for you to try, one step at a time. I hope that you’ll glance back at the hymn we sang before the Gospel was read and cast your eyes to the bottom of the page to see the author of that text. I hope that your understanding of the Trinity has broadened in some way that is meaningful for your spiritual growth. I pray that I have not dipped into heretical thoughts, but if I have, we’re about to apply the corrective of the Athanasian Creed anyway, so I shall receive my admonishment. In any event, and above all else, I pray that *“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”*

Amen.