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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

June 15, 2025

Year C, Trinity Sunday, Revised Common Lectionary

[Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31](#)

[Psalm 8](#)

[Romans 5:1-5](#)

[John 16:12-15](#)

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Back in the 1600s, Isaac Newton suggested that light was made up of tiny particles. That explained how it could reflect off mirrors, like a billiard ball bouncing off a rail, and how a glass of water could bend its path, like the path of a bullet fired into a pond. It was a good theory. It explained some things and helped people study light and use it effectively.

But over the next couple of centuries scientists noticed that light does things particles generally don't. For example, if you shine a beam of light through two slits in a partition, the light on the other side forms an interference pattern of dark and light stripes. The spreading waves of light from each slit could amplify each other or cancel each other out, like waves traveling along a jump rope or a body of water. People started to think of light not as a particle but as a wave. It was a good theory. It explained some things and helped people study light and use it effectively.

Then came the 20th century. People like Einstein noticed that light carries energy not as a smooth continuum, but in little all-or-nothing packets—quanta. It seemed like light was kind of a particle again. Then Louis de Broglie showed that even particles like electrons can behave like waves and cancel each other out. Today quantum mechanics suggests there's no clear distinction between particles and waves in the first place. Both are ways quantum objects can behave depending on how they're measured.

So is light a particle? A wave? In a very real way it's both. In the end, light is light; it is what it is, whatever we call it. Our language and concepts can only get us so far. But we can't do without them. They're all we have. And they can *work*, as far as they go. Thinking of light as a wave, or as a particle, can help you make predictions about it, interact with it meaningfully with new technologies. Those concepts are metaphors that only go so far, but as my linguistics teacher George Lakoff said, metaphors are things we live by.

Back in the 30s or so AD, the very first Christians had their worlds transformed by the life and teaching of Jesus, his death, his resurrection, the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and all their own experiences of God in their lives. They struggled to find language to talk about Jesus, this human being like one of them who was clearly also so much more. They included him in their worship. They prayed to him and felt his presence, a presence they recognized as nothing other than the presence of the living God. Was he a particle? Was he a wave? Was he God? Was he human? He was both. This human who had been flesh and blood among us was also God, fully and completely. Yet he wasn't just identical with the God he called Father and he himself prayed to. God was one yet two, two yet one.

And then too there was the Holy Spirit, the gift Jesus had sent according to his promise. The Spirit of God, God experienced again in a new way, completely one with Jesus and with the Father, not separable in any way, yet also different: not just the Father with a mask on or Jesus in a dove costume. After all, the same Jesus who prayed to the Father also promised to send his church “another” advocate once he himself had left them. God was one yet three, three yet one.

The early Christians found language in their scriptures to help them articulate all this. They found passages like today’s reading from Proverbs about the Wisdom of God, a kind of personified divine companion with God from the beginning, and they applied them to Jesus. They found passages about the Word of God and applied them to Jesus. They found of course passages all through scripture about the Spirit of God. They saw hints throughout the Hebrew scriptures of a God of multiplicity in unity, the same God they were coming to know through their own experience of God as Great Parent and God as Christ and God as Life-Giving Spirit.

Today is Trinity Sunday, a day when we celebrate the church’s faith in a God who is Three in One and One in Three. Sometimes it can be hard for people to get excited about a feast day that’s about not a saint with an interesting story, nor a dramatic event like the transfiguration or the ascension, but a doctrine. Doctrine is a word that gets a bad rap sometimes but simply means, “teaching.” A doctrine is something the church teaches, something Christians believe is true. But truth isn’t just an abstraction. Truth, if it’s really true, is as real as a crucified body, as real as friendship, as real as love.

The doctrine of the Trinity comes straight out of the messy lived experience of real people scrambling to know and love and follow God. The Nicene Creed, which we say every Sunday, is like the church's lab notebook—the compilation of notes on God that Christians put together over the first four centuries. The doctrine of the Trinity is the record of generations of Jesus' friends finding words for their experience of the God who made us, the God who came among us, the God who fills us with power and joy and peace.

Sometime around the year 200 the Christian writer Tertullian coined a new word: *Trinitas*, a hybrid of the word for “three” and the word “unity.” It's the source of our word Trinity, which doesn't mean three and doesn't mean one but means both. Thrinity, if you like. Three in one and one in three. The Father is God, fully and completely. Jesus is God, fully and completely. The Spirit is God, fully and completely. Yet there are not three Gods, but one God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the one who created the world and each of us out of love.

And love is maybe the most striking thing about the Trinity. Because one of the things this strange, experimental doctrine of the Trinity means is relationship is at the heart of God. The Father and the Son and the Spirit *love* each other. They are united in an eternal dance of perfect understanding, perfect partnership, perfect intimacy.

Last week at Pentecost I spoke about how God's vision for humanity is not sameness, nor division, but diversity united in harmony. We need that vision now as much as ever, as bombs rain on Tehran and Tel Aviv, as political violence rocks our life in this country, as all the forces of hatred push on us every day to isolate us from one another and pit us against each other. Today as we celebrate the Trinity we insist that God's very heart is about difference and connectedness. That's not just something God happens to prefer for *us*. It's rooted in who God is in God's own self: perfect difference in perfect love.

I often talk about the famous icon of the Trinity by the 15th-century painter Andrei Rublev that shows the Trinity as three figures sitting around a table. You may know it. What's striking about the icon is the way they lean toward each other in love—and the way the fourth side of the table is open. There's a place for you.

God is not a lonely monarch ruling from afar. God is a communion of love—and love, by its nature, wants to draw others in. The eternal dance of Father, Son, and Spirit has been opened to us. All it takes is the willingness to say yes. Yes to love. Yes to difference-in-unity. Yes to a life of relationship, of joy, of challenge, of belonging, from before time and into eternity.