

Trinity Sunday, Year C

- The word ‘theology’ is a bit of a bad word to some people – for some people it just makes them nervous – trying to speak of God seems daunting, who’s got the time to pick through all the different threads of Scripture and reconcile them all into a coherent tapestry depicting God?
- Or for some others it just doesn’t sound very enjoyable – the sort of thing that maybe you have to be just a little bit off to get too excited about
- And of course it doesn’t help that, at some in our lives in the faith, we’ve all known someone who was just a little too sure of their theology – too sure of who God was and what God intended and exactly what that meant that we ought to be doing with our lives
- So maybe we have good reasons for getting a little bit skittish anytime someone starts talking about theology
- But today, theology is sort of inevitable – today is that day in our calendar called Trinity Sunday, a holy day that I confess I have a bit of a love/hate relationship with
- For one, it’s the only holiday (at least, in our calendar) devoted to either a doctrine or a theological reality, depending on how you look at it – though I think to the average person there may not be a lot of daylight between those two
- It’s a day known in some places as ‘seminarian Sunday’ because it tends to be one of the days you can expect to hear potentially muddled sermons from seminarians desperate to make the doctrine of the Trinity perfectly clear – seminarians who’ve been pressed into service by rectors or supervisors who just don’t want to try to preach the Trinity anymore
- But it’s also a day devoted to that great mystery of God, that fundamental reality of who God is in God’s very being – the very heart of our Christian faith
- In his great treatise on the Trinity, St. Augustine essentially begins with a qualification or caveat – it’s possible, he says, to find fault with his language, and there may be many works that are expressed more clearly than his – but all the same, it is good for him to write his book in case people don’t find those other, clearer works – but, in addition, it is good for many people to write books, in hopes that eventually, by coming at the mystery of the faith he’s writing about from a multitude of angles, the truth is explained as clearly as possible
- In other words, the arrogance some people assume theologians have, the presumption it seems that it must take to try to speak about God, isn’t always the case
- And I think of Augustine’s words often, especially anytime I’m daunted by trying to

convey the reality of something greater than I – which, incidentally, I tend to do roughly once a week, usually right around this time

- But it's a valuable reminder that, sure, I know I'm not going to get it perfect, that we can never, not one of us, ever get it perfect – because what kind of God would we be worshipping that could be confined within whatever words and phrases we might fashion?
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- But even though I'm not going to get it perfect, it's worth the effort – because the alternative is just asserting that God is unknowable – on some level, it's true – we will never comprehend all of God – but that doesn't mean we shouldn't seek to try
- And it's worth the effort because what we do come up with might actually be helpful, to ourselves or to others
- So we work at describing God, trying to understand God – we just do so knowing that there's a difference between a helpful image or a useful analogy and the capital-T Truth – that's true of most things, but most especially of God
- So I would like to talk a bit about the Trinity – just with the caveat that what I'm about to say is **not** capital-T Truth – and it may not even be an illustration you find helpful – and if so, like Augustine, I pray you ignore it
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- There was another book I read in seminary by a man named Jon Levenson called *Sinai and Zion* – and the thesis of that book is that there are sort of two different ways of talking about God in the Hebrew Bible, two contrasting schools of thought at work – and the images Levenson uses are two mountains
- The first, Sinai, is of course the mountain where the law is given to Moses the mountain where God's incredible power is shown forth in thunder and awe – where God's justice and transcendence are most palpable – it's the mountain on which there is no mistaking who created the world, and just how mighty and beyond us God actually is
- And the second mountain is Zion – the hill on which the city of David is built – the term that comes to represent the location of God's temple and, by extension, God's indwelling presence on earth, among God's people – it is the mountain used to convey God's mercy towards us, God's nearness to us, what theologians call God's immanence – it's the place where we know that God is right here among us
- The Trinity is partly – not fully and not only – but partly, a means of reconciling these two different sets of concepts that permeate not only the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament,

but also the New Testament

- In the Trinity, we recognize that we worship a God whom we sometimes call “the Father,” a God who is infinitely greater than we are as God’s creatures and creations – we worship a God who fashioned the universe and everything in it and is therefore greater even than our constantly-expanding reality – a God so vast as to make us insignificant, so good as to make even the best of us seem wretched, so powerful as to highlight our inadequacies
- And yet, that same God walked the earth with us in the person of Jesus Christ, “the Son” – a human being so forgiving, so compassionate and merciful, so loving that I’d say he put us all to shame if he didn’t seem so intent on showing us the way out of shame and guilt forever – and not merely a human being, either, but God incarnate, both human and divine
- And between those two seeming extremes, across that yawning gulf that separates us, imperfect and finite and insignificant creatures, from the magnificence and grandeur of God – across that gap stretches the Holy Spirit, that person of the Trinity that Augustine described as the love shared between the Father and the Son – a love great enough to reconcile and unite those two opposite poles
- If you haven’t already, you will hear people complain about the Trinity as unimportant, or esoteric, or maybe even say it’s the sort of thing only theologians would worry too much about
- But we’re all theologians, really, anytime we make a statement about God – and as for the rest, don’t you believe it
- The Trinity is who God is – in God’s very being as well as our experience of God:
- God the Father beyond us and above us, God the Son beside us and within us, and God the Holy Spirit uniting us all to one another, and raising us up to God
- At least, that’s one way to think about it
- If that one doesn’t work for you, there are a number of others – none of them perfect, none of them comprehensive – none of them worth holding onto if they get in the way
- Because the Trinity isn’t meant to be a theory about God – isn’t meant to be just a dogma
- The Trinity is the God we worship, the God who is always looking down at us and yet right with us, expecting us to do better and forgiving us when we don’t – the God known for justice, and for mercy, and always for love