

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

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”

Jesus spoke these words to his beloved disciples on the eve of his crucifixion.

In the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit that Jesus speaks of has many names,

Paraclete,

Advocate,

and Spirit of Truth.

Last week we celebrated the gift of that Spirit in the feast of Pentecost.

We were all decked out in red,

and we had biblical imagery of wind and fire and smoke.

As much as we try to explain and describe the Holy Spirit,

it remains mysterious.

And the Holy Spirit is just one part of an even greater mystery,

the holy Trinity.

Today is Trinity Sunday,

the day where we celebrate the mysterious experience

of one God in three persons,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

To talk about the doctrine of the holy Trinity

is to step into very deep, and very dark waters.

It is something we experience every day of our lives,

and yet it is difficult to explain.

The lines between orthodoxy and heresy get very close together.

There is tension.

I was warned on my Facebook page,

that it might be safer to say nothing and just show pictures of kittens,

but who said preaching was about playing it safe.

It is probably best in this case to start with heresy.

(I thought that would get your attention).

Most heresies in the church are examples of incomplete thought,

and so they are in some ways way points along the road to the truth.

They become dangerous only if you stop there. If you get stuck there.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”

When you explore the past history of the church

you find that many of the great heresies

were at one point considered orthodox by some portion of the church,

often for decades, and occasionally even for centuries.

The doctrine of the Trinity and how it developed is a wonderful case in point.

The central tenant of the Trinity is one God in three persons.

Can you see the mathematical tension there;

$1=3$ .

The heresies get into the picture

when one emphasizes one side of the equation at the expense of the other.

If we push the one God side,

and say that the three persons aren't really separate,

but just the three different ways that God acts in our lives,

notably as creator, redeemer, and sanctifier,

we wander into the great heresy of modalism.

If we push the three persons side of the equation,

and say that God is really three separate beings,

A Father, a Son, and a Holy Spirit,

separate entities all joined by their one divinity,

we wander into the great heresy of tritheism.

Notice that neither of the above positions is completely false,

but each is incomplete without the other.

In the later part of the last century,

as the church struggled to find a way to use gender neutral language for God,  
a blessing that came into favor named God as

“God Almighty, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,” or sometimes

“God Almighty, creating, redeeming, and sanctifying.”

Is this modalism?

In the first part of the blessing

each of the three persons are addressed in separate petitions as individuals.

Is this tritheism?

As with much of the Christian life

there is, or should be, a tension between the two.

Each is incomplete without the other.

One -- Three;

Death -- Resurrection;

Judgement -- Forgiveness;

Sin -- Redemption;

Mortal -- Everlasting life.

We live in the kingdom of God, and yet await it's perfection.

The wonderful discontinuity of the Trinity

is a constant reminder of this important tension.

Brian McLaren,

a leader in the emergent church movement,

says that the most important purpose of the doctrine of the Trinity

is to remind us that God is mysterious.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”

These words are both comforting and unsettling.

Comforting because they leave us time to grow up.

We don't have to know everything now.

Unsettling because it makes us wonder what is it today  
that Christ cannot yet reveal to us

because we cannot bear it?

What pieces of the ultimate truth are beyond our ability to comprehend,  
or to put it a different way,

What are the truths of tomorrow that the Spirit is guiding us toward?

How will we know?

In the fifth century,

St. Vincent of Lerins decided that the Spirit was done talking  
and came up with what is now known as the Vincentian Canon.

It states that orthodox Christian doctrine

is that doctrine which has been believed everywhere, always and by all.

It was an attempt to limit any further change to the doctrine of the church.

An attempt to ease the unsettling nature

of Christ's statement in the Gospel this morning.

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth."

The Episcopal church continues to go through much change

as we struggle with issues of sexuality and gender identity.

Many in the church feel that the church has left the true way,

while many others feel that it is at last living into the true way.

All may be right. All may be wrong.

We must wait for the Spirit.

Every day science teaches us new facts about our world.

It was barely a decade ago

that we saw the first evidence of a planet in orbit around another star,

and a whole bunch of theories turned into facts.

In an article I read yesterday,

it said that over 50% of the red dwarf stars in our galaxy  
have stars that may be capable of supporting life.

Just a few years ago

we heard that scientists in a lab have created a living cell out of lifeless matter.  
They didn't do it the way Mary Shelley imagined it would be done in 1818,  
but they raised many of the same questions;  
and this time, the questions were no longer just academic.

In the church, part of our job is to find the meaning behind new facts like these,  
to discover in those facts the under lying truths.

Sadly, some faith traditions have decided to just ignore,  
or worse disbelieve these new facts,  
or worse still invent their own alternate reality.

What if the Spirit is using these new facts to reveal to us a new truth,  
a truth we could not bear before today?

Or to put it another way, though the facts may be irrefutable,  
the truths may still be more than we can yet bear.

And so we must wait for the Spirit of truth.

But it must be an active waiting.

We are creatures of God,  
but we are made in the image of God,  
and so we too are involved  
in the holy work of creating, redeeming and sustaining.

As the psalmist says,

“What is man that you should be mindful of him?

the son of man that you should seek him out?

You have made him but little lower than the angels;

you adorn him with glory and honor;

You give him mastery over the works of your hands.”

We have been given a special place in God's creation, and in God's heart.

It is a holy place, a place set apart.

It is both a place of honor  
and a place of great responsibility.

The responsibility comes

with the need to discern God's will  
out of the milieu of voices and demands that come at us every day,  
and to make it known to those around us.

How are we to know what is from God?

Where is the Spirit of truth leading us today?

Where are we being sent?

What is it that Christ is trying to tell us, that we cannot yet bear?

Where do we, as a church

and as individuals  
need to grow up more fully into the stature of Christ?

We speak in our prayers of children growing into the full stature of Christ.

In reality, growing into the full stature of Christ is a lifetime endeavor.

Christ was so in touch with both the Father and the Spirit

that he could honestly say that they were one.

That is the goal we seek,  
the ideal we strive for.

The doctrine of the Trinity reminds us that at the heart of what God is,  
is relationship.

That is why the work of discernment is done together, in relationship.

Look around you.

Remember that together,  
we are the embodiment of God in the world.

We are the body of Christ.

It is we who,

by the grace of God,

will make the kingdom of God manifest in the world.

Or will not.

“When the Spirit of truth comes,

he will guide you into all the truth...

and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”

If you can separate those words from the distractions of the world,

you might hear things that will take you into a new reality,

a new truth.

A more complete revelation of the full truth we all wait for.

They may be words that only yesterday you couldn't bear to hear,

but today they fire your heart;

compelling you to action.

Do not be afraid.

Though the road ahead may be difficult and long,

we are not alone.

The long journey of faith is crowded with saints before and behind.

Our job is to take the little wisdom we have been given,

grow it in faith,

and pass it on to those who will follow.

In this way the kingdom is revealed.

It may be that there are parts of the truth we will never find in our life.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.”

It must be enough for us to know

that the full truth will come in God's time

if we have the courage to remain faithful.

As we live more and more into the mystery of the Trinity,

becoming more engaged in the strange enigma

of the three in one and one in three,

living our lives in the midst of that mystical relationship that is God,

we will find the grace of God empowering our own feeble gifts  
of creation, redemption, and sanctification.

God will be known in our work,  
and the kingdom of God will come near.

That is our goal.

That is our prayer.

That is our hope.

Amen.