



Keeping Us Honest ... and Humble

Psalm 8 & 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Trinity Sunday - May 31, 2026

Rev. Dr. Martin R. Ankrum

Every year within the Christian Church, the first Sunday following Pentecost is Trinity Sunday. It's like clockwork – no matter what we are dealing with as a congregation, as the people of God, as people of our culture, the text breaks into our lives and reminds us both of who God is and, consequently, of who we really are.

Peter Gomes of Harvard University fame, once preached a sermon on Trinity Sunday entitled, 'The Big Picture.' Gomes rather profoundly concluded that sermon with this:

Why does the church cling to the Trinity in the face of the claims of the modern need for tidy, useful thoughts? The church is bound to the Trinity because it works to explain the unexplainable and it helps to draw the big picture, it satisfies our need to engage and stretch and stimulate our

imagination, it enlivens our worship, it stimulates our debate, and it gives us cause to wait out the impatient adversities of this fallen and falling world. The Trinity is the expression of our ultimate optimism in the face of our provisional pessimism. The Trinity allows us to imagine, experience, anticipate, and celebrate the wholeness and unity of God, and the only appropriate response to all of that is to worship him with those who fall down before him saying, 'Thou art worthy, Or Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power, because thou didst create all things; by thy will they were created and have their being.' Such is to experience the fullness, the wholeness, the unity of God: the one who was, and is, and is to be; and that's the big picture.

The doctrine of the Trinity helps us to see the big picture about life and about God's involvement in all creation. Without it, we are tempted to become balkanized into little communities of singularity that seeks to live our lives through our own particular and unique lens on life. No, the doctrine of the Trinity as much as it both over-simplifies and over-complicates the being of God, serves to deliver us from spiritual pride and offers instead a certain approach of humility when it comes to attempting to define or categorize God. We don't define or categorize God, we instead come to learn from scripture, from tradition, just who God is for us and for the world.

N.T. Wright put it this way:

You either embrace God, this God who is both three and one, or you embrace idols. The first way is the way to life, to the enhancement and ultimate affirmation of the humanness that reflects the creator himself. The second way is the way to ruin, to the ultimate destruction and dehumanization, at every social and personal level, of that image.

Though Wright puts this in seemingly dualistic terms, one way good, the other way bad, there is truth here. It is a matter of making some choices about how we comprehend both the being of God and the purposes of God for humankind. One way provides us with some imagination and openness, the other becomes fodder for our own imagination and our own self-justifying images of a God who appears much more like the empire or the powers that be rather than the witness of scripture.

William Willimon, my favorite Methodist theologian, adds something of import here. (This is a long quote, so please have some patience with both Willimon and me:)

When I was a college chaplain, whenever the topic of religious differences on campus came up, there was always someone to say, ‘Well, I’m Methodist, you’re Muslim, she’s Jewish, but after all, we all worship the same God, don’t we?’

Eventually I found it necessary to answer no. As Christians we do not believe in some monistic, generic, vague, easily managed, and inoffensive god, we believe that God is Trinity. ... Long ago our government found that if you make God generic, private, and personal, you are free to run the state as you please. [Generic, private, and personal are the very antithesis of Trinity]. Christians are those who believe that we haven’t said ‘God’ until we’ve said ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.’ ...

The doctrine of the Trinity is the greatest intellectual achievement of Christian theology. It is our talk about God. It is that which preserves Christian talk about God from sliding into the morass of trivial inconsequentiality some call ‘spirituality’ – that is, a projection of our vaunting egos and narcissistic longings into something called ‘god.’ The Trinity is that which makes clear that whoever we mean with the name God, we’re not talking about us.

The doctrine of the Trinity keeps us honest when we think or speak about God. We are called by the witness of the Christian faith to be careful just how we proclaim God in this world; we are not free to take just any concept we wish from the society, from the culture, from the moment of history or from our own experience and turn it into somehow represented in the God who made us, redeems us, and sustains us. We are called to understand that God is beyond our complete and total comprehension, and we are at our best with speaking of God when we say that there is a bit of a mystery here that must be lived with for a lifetime. In fact, this mystery that bids us to come out of ourselves is the very animating force that causes us to really live and live into that God that we know as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

At heart, as well, the Trinity reminds us that God is not an isolated, remote Supreme being that has no desire or conception of relatedness. The Trinity puts the lie to the misunderstanding that God is the unmovable and unmoved mover who is enthroned in isolation and glory. Many folks unfortunately think of God as the great monad who lords it over all creation in a manner recognizable in all human tyrants and bullies. If one understands God in the biblical sense of the Trinity, one can no longer endure the image of God as a remote and angry isolated supreme tyrant. If one sees the Trinity as the biblical explanation of who God is, one comes to an understanding that God is holy relatedness – that is that God is related within God’s very self in a manner that leads to creating, redeeming and sustaining all of creation and all of us.

But we are not called to follow a doctrine. We understand that it is not a doctrine that redeems our life and seeks to restore creation. We are called to follow the risen and living Christ. We are told that it is the redemptive and restorative and transforming work of God that we witness in Jesus of Nazareth and it is only by the urging of the Holy Spirit that we can ever come to recognize this and live its reality.

This morning we receive yet another confirmation class into membership of this church. It is tempting to think that they have graduated, as it were, from the school of God. They have had their youthful minds and hearts filled up with the doctrines of the Christian church and now they are fully formed followers of the risen One ready to take their place alongside the rest of us.

Well, if we assert that we would be right on one hand and wrong on the other. We would be right to say that they now will take their place alongside the rest of us as witnesses to the love, mercy and grace of God in Jesus Christ. But we would be wrong to think that either they or we are fully formed followers of Christ. We are all, along with this confirmation class, on the way of Christ. We are never done with the school of God, the church, as it were. They, like us, should be considering how the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit continue to inform our living and inspire our ministry to this world.

May Tia, Ella, and Asher, along with the rest of us, continue to grow in the firm assurance of God’s redeeming love for us and for all creation. May their witness, along with our own, bear forth this truth that we have learned and are still learning, from the apostle Paul who said:

God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing.

May we and they continue to do so, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.