

SERMON

Trinity Sunday

Theme

St Peter, Quamichan

15.6.25

Trinity Sunday is not one of those occasions which lends itself to an easy selection of scripture readings. It is, as you know, one of the Church's seven principal feasts, and the only one which takes a doctrine, rather than an event, for its theme. More than this, it is a doctrine which was not formulated in an agreed manner until long after the scriptures had been written, and the canon of Scripture, closed. What we find in the biblical text, therefore, are fragmentary ideas and ways of speaking, which coupled with faithful reflection on Christian experience, brought the Church eventually to a description of God as one being (or substance), and three persons.

The trick is neither to "confuse the persons," in other words, making them a wash, nor to "divide the substance," so that we end up with three Gods, rather than one.

Now the fact that the Church teaches a doctrine of the Trinity doesn't mean that we necessarily "practise it." For example, one common explanation of the Trinity is that God simply shows different aspects of the divine being to us, sometimes as the Almighty, judging, Father, sometimes as the merciful self-giving Son, sometimes as the inspiring Spirit. This is actually a heresy, called modalism, condemned because it suggests that the Persons of the Godhead are essentially transitory, a sort of mask God assumes when dealing with us. By this reading, God can never be Father and Son and Spirit all at the same time. So the unity of God is protected, but the Trinity of Persons is lost.

Another approach, which I'm afraid is simple tritheism, is sometimes articulated when people tell me that they can't really relate to God the Father, so they just pray to Jesus. Or they just soak in the Spirit. Here the Trinity of Persons is protected, but the oneness of the three is lost.

Nor does the Church, when it promotes individual piety, or lets people off the hook with respect to a communal expression of faith and worship (such as going to church on Sunday), demonstrate any real appreciation of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Trinity means that the One God is in his essence, *social*. And we, who are created in the image and likeness of this God, are also called to social existence, to a community of persons bound together by love. Love is the glue that holds the Godhead together. In the Orthodox Church, they have a word for this: perichoresis... and means *dance*. It is this view of the Trinity that demands we deal with our differences *as a matter of celebration*, and we make room for diversity as the very thing which love is meant to hold together. Diversity is what love is for! A church which is homogeneous, or which can only handle its differences by hiving people off into interest groups, or letting people have their turn (to use a very old example, landowners on Sunday morning, and “the help” on Sunday evening...I’m sure you can think of any number of other examples), has not yet figured out what it means to be Trinitarian.

It isn’t just a matter of getting how we say it right. The Trinity is God, and God is about what we *do*, too.