

Trinity Sunday 2026

A Sermon Preached by Dr Trevor Kimball

on May 24, 2026

Genesis 1:1-2:4a / Canticle 13 / 2 Corinthians 13:11-13 / Matthew 28:16-20

*“The eleven disciples went to Galilee,  
to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.  
When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.”  
Amen.*

This morning is Trinity Sunday, which means it's the Sunday each year we set aside to talk the Christian understanding of God, or what we call the Trinity.

So, what is the Trinity? Don't worry — it's super simple.

The doctrine of the Trinity says there is one God in three “persons” — the Father, the Son, and the Spirit — each of which is identical with the one God, but none of which are identical with each other.

Got it? No?

Let me try again. There is one God. God is Father, Son, and Spirit. The Father is fully God, the Son is fully God, the Spirit is fully God. But the Father is not the Son or the Spirit. The Son is not the Spirit or the Father. And the Spirit is not the Father or the Son.

Clear now?

If you're thinking this sounds confusing and rather unnecessary, you're in good company. Back in 1822, Friedrich Schleiermacher — one of the most influential modern Protestant theologians — relegated the Trinity to an appendix in his great work of theology. This set the tone for the next 150 years, when many serious

Christians quietly set it aside: a leftover of fourth-century metaphysical speculation.

But then, beginning in the 1960s and 70s, a new generation of theologians began deeply engaging with the doctrine, and by the time I began studying academic theology in 2007, the Trinity had returned to the center of the theological mainstream.

So what changed?

I think that there was a renewed understanding of the historical development of the doctrine, and how those debates in the first few centuries after Christ can speak to us and our contemporary concerns.

Let's begin with how it developed. And this morning, there's no better place to begin than the very beginning.

We read in Genesis: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Not the gods. Not competing heavenly powers. God. This monotheism was the great theological innovation of Judaism. And by the time of the Gospels, every observant Jew — Jesus and his disciples among them — would recite the same prayer, morning and evening: "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one."

That is what makes the next part so strange. We read in Matthew that those same disciples, on a mountain in Galilee, fell down and worshipped the risen Jesus. That Greek word for 'worshipped' is used strategically across the gospel, and seems to indicate a level of reverence that would be inappropriate for a mere human being. They believed in one God, yet they worshipped Jesus.

Were they leaving monotheism behind? Not at all. In their practice, before they could say it in their theology, they were confessing that the one God of Israel had shown up uniquely in this man.

This is where talk of the Trinity has to start: a small group of monotheists, working to square the God of Israel with the Christ they had met and the Spirit poured out among them.

The New Testament gives us formulas — like the one we heard this morning: “baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” But it never spells the full doctrine out, and over the next few centuries, there was a contested process that involved serious grappling with scripture and experience, with Jesus’ relation to the father, with the moving of the spirit, with their own experiences.

The conflicts that emerged from connecting monotheism with their own experiences of radical inclusion, forgiveness and acceptance are very interesting, but I had to cut them to keep this sermon from running well beyond anyone’s attention span.

But the point I want to make here is that the doctrine of the Trinity emerged by taking all of it seriously at once: their experience, their scriptures, and the oneness of God. And that is what the theologians of the last century recovered — not history for its own sake, but what is at stake in this doctrine, for how we think about God, and how we think about ourselves.

So — what is at stake?

To speak of the Trinity is to say that, at the foundation of everything, are the three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit — utterly distinct, and yet utterly one, giving and receiving without rivalry.

In God, difference is not a problem to be managed, or a competition to be won.

Difference is the very form of love.

And if the God who made us, the God whose image we bear, is relational all the way down, then three things follow.

Theologically, it means love is at the center of everything. This sounds beautiful and comforting, but it's also concerning, because we can't read our ideas about love back into God. Instead, we need to shape our concept of love by looking at what is revealed of God. And there, we do not find blind force, or raw power, or random chance. We find persons — giving and receiving in unity without overcoming or absorbing each other, each giving fully of themselves without being overwhelmed or being any less themselves.

This leads to my ethical implication of the doctrine of the Trinity, namely, that true solidarity is possible. The many forces dividing us human beings are very real: the cruelty, the lines we draw, the people we treat as disposable. But division is not the deepest thing. And so we have a model for standing with the stranger and still let them be strange to us. We can cross the lines that divide us without erasing the difference between us.

This is the costly work of solidarity: not the comfort of the like-minded, gathered together, but the harder peace, made with the stranger, and even the enemy. We do not get to claim God for our side. We are asked only to witness — with our lives, not just our words — to a deeper peace that was there before the strife and conflict.

And existentially, it means we are able to seek union with God without being dissolved and losing our selves. There is an old intuition that to be close to God is to disappear into God — the drop falling back into the ocean. But the God of the Trinity is not a featureless unity. At the very heart of God is difference, held in love. And it is this God who holds us in being, every moment. So we can be drawn

as close to God as it is possible to come — and not vanish. The closer we are held, the more fully ourselves we become.

And yet, for all of this, we have not explained the Trinity. We have not solved it. What we have is a grammar, a way of speaking that holds together everything we have seen: the experience of those first disciples, the long history of how the church learned to speak of God, the lives we are now called to live, and the deepest questions we carry about who we are. The mystery is no smaller than when we began. But this grammar lets us stand in front of it and not look away.

And to stand in front of the mystery without looking away — that is worship. It does not ask us to be certain. It has room for our doubt.

Because Matthew tells us that when the disciples saw the risen Jesus, they worshipped him, but some doubted. Even there, on the mountain, face to face with him, some were unsure. The Gospel does not erase this. The doubt is part of the story from the very beginning.

And it would be honest to say that some of us, here this morning, are not sure either. That is all right. We are speaking of a God at the very limits of our language — a God we cannot point to or hold in our hands. Our task was never to master this mystery, or to be certain of it. Our task is to open ourselves, doubt and all, to the divine life of the Trinity.

So we do what the disciples did on the mountain: we worship, even as we doubt — bowing before the one God who, beyond all our words and all our wavering, has come in love to find us.

Amen.