

## ***God in Community, Three in One***

A message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

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First of all, the Trinity is a doctrine that has perplexed Christians, and some scholars have spent their entire lives trying to explain it through the centuries. Saint Augustine, the great church father, once said of the Trinity,

Spend your life trying to understand it, and you will lose your mind;  
but deny it and you will lose your soul.<sup>1</sup>

The early Christians took the appended last section of the Gospel storyteller, Matthew's telling of Jesus and the great commission. Jesus tells the disciples to go out and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

Let's consider for a moment the mystery of the Three, somehow co-existing, connected, yet each, themselves, unique. First, God the Creator. Then, Jesus, born as a vulnerable human baby, yet holy messengers proclaim him also divine – to quote from scholar Marcus Borg, we distinguish between the “Jesus of History” from the “Christ of Faith.” The Third in the Trinity, Spirit – described in dramatic ways as “descending” at Jesus' baptism, as like a dove.<sup>3</sup> Described in the Book of Acts as falling on Jesus' friends after his death, like tongues of fire.<sup>4</sup> Creator, Christ and Spirit. Three in One.

What do we make of this? Look it up on your favourite search engine and you will find reams of articles by scholars, sometimes trying to explain the Trinity. The truth, I think, is that the Trinity is a very human and limited way of describing the Holy – ultimately, it is a mystery.

I remember the line from that old hymn, *Holy, Holy, Holy*<sup>5</sup>, “God in three persons, blessed Trinity”. Then I think of the phrase by liturgist Thom M. Shuman that is the theme for this Message, *God in Community, Holy in One*. Community. If we look at *doctrines* as models of faith rather than fact, perhaps it is worth considering Trinity is a model, imperfect as it is, for understanding God, not a solo deity, but part of an interwoven, interdependent body.



Like this Trinity Knot. God, the Creator. God who set the universe in motion. Science tells us that the universe was not created in seven days, but over millions of years. Mysteriously, a Creative force, a Wisdom in Nature, that ensures the complex interdependency of Creation, and evolution – an ever-changing process, change as a constant.

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<sup>1</sup> If you are feeling adventurous, you can find “Of the Trinity” by Augustine of Hippo here:

<https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/augustine/On%20The%20Trinity%20-%20Augustine.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Matthew chapter 28, verse 19

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, John 1:29-34. Click this link to find these passages from the different Gospels: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%203%3A13-17%2CMark%201%3A9-11%2CLuke%203%3A21-22%2CJohn%201%3A29-34&version=CEB>

<sup>4</sup> Acts chapter 2, verses 1 to 15, found by clicking

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+2%3A+1-15&version=CEB>

Jesus, or Christ, the “word” becoming flesh, as John’s Gospel opens. Imagine, a tiny vulnerable baby who lived among us, loved, cried in grief, showed fear, and who died as a human. Yet, somehow also defied death. Mystery.

The Spirit, “Ruach” in the Hebrew Scriptures, that brooded over the unformed universe in the Genesis Creation Story, and “Pneuma” in the Christian Scriptures, the Greek word for Spirit described variously as wind, breath, a catalyst of energy and change. This is not historical truth, or scientific fact, but a *truth of faith* for Christian Tradition. The Trinity is a metaphor that suggests that the God of Bible and Tradition is not like the stereotypical father on vacation, refusing to look for a map, or to listen to his navigator. Of course, gender roles have evolved, men ask for help, most times. Our old models of understanding life on earth and the Holy need to evolve.

The Trinity Knot is a symbol not just used by Christians, but variations of this were found in India over 5,000 years old. For Pagans, from whom early Christians often borrowed symbols, this symbol means the threefold nature of Goddess as mother, maiden, and crone. Goddess representing creation, maiden as innocence and crone symbolizing wisdom.<sup>6</sup>

Three interdependent, interwoven entities in one. I have heard powerful prayers offered, addressing each of the members of this Trinity. Personally, I’m a big fan of Spirit, myself. I often quietly pray in worship that the Spirit will blow open the door and ruffle our feathers, spice things up a bit. Sometimes surprises come in worship; I attribute that to Spirit. Can I prove it? No. Do I believe in it? Absolutely.



This is, of course, a modern depiction of the Trinity. This was by artist Kelly Latimore, creator of striking modern iconography like this image, “The Trinity.”<sup>7</sup> Many of his other pieces of art depict famous people, Kelly was asked if these are specific women of history. Kelly refuses to answer this.

Kelly does include this quote from Richard Rohr to accompany “The Trinity” on his website: “‘Circling around’ is all we can do. Our speaking of God is a search for similes, analogies, and metaphors. All theological language is an approximation, offered tentatively in holy awe. That’s the best human language can achieve. ... we must – absolutely must – maintain a fundamental humility before the Great Mystery. If we do not, religion always worships itself and its formulations and never God.”

I say “Amen” to that!

Trinity as holy community. It reminds us that we need community. This week, may we struggle to nurture community, even as so many forces in our world tempt us to do it ourselves; may we extravagantly love every neighbour we meet, and remember that we are all interdependent, interwoven. The mystery of Love. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.celtic-weddingrings.com/celtic-resources/trinity-knot-meaning>

<sup>7</sup> His pieces can be found online at <https://kellylatimoreicons.com/en-ca/products/the-trinity>