

6.16.2019 Trinity Sunday

Book 4 of *Mere Christianity* is titled: *Beyond Personality, or First steps in the Doctrine of the Trinity*. It is there that C.S. Lewis wrote these words, “All sorts of people are fond of repeating the Christian statement that ‘God is love’. But they seem not to notice that the words ‘God is love’ have no real meaning unless God contains at least two Persons. Love is something that one person has for another person. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, He was not love.”

The doctrine of the Trinity distinguishes Christians from every other world religion, and Lewis’ statement reveals the magnitude of this separation. While other religions speak of God’s love for humanity, or even God being full of love, it is through our understanding of one God in three distinct Persons that Christians are able to make the powerful declaration that God doesn’t simply love people, He is not just full of love, “*God is love*” (1 John 4:8). The very essence of God is love, and His eternal love must find its origin in the perfect and personal union that exists between the Father and the Son through the Spirit, for as Lewis points out, love cannot exist without an object to love. When we consider the doctrine of the Trinity from a personal, relational perspective, we are reminded that the Bible is not a scientific textbook, but a love story. A love story that is revealed in the pages of Holy Scripture, where we meet one God in three Persons, three Divine Persons who are one God and have always existed in an eternal, intimate relationship.

This morning many pastors and ministers will do their best to explain the doctrine of the Trinity, but just as many will do everything they can to avoid it, for it is perhaps the most inexpressible mystery of our faith. It’s similar to St. John in our Epistle today trying to find words to describe heaven, or in the Gospel, Nicodemus trying to reason “*How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?*” (John 3:4). We can certainly attempt to bring the holy mystery of the Trinity to our level of understanding, but each attempt falls short for this doctrine that there is one God in three Persons, three distinct, divine Persons who are each fully God and who are by nature one God, is simply beyond human comprehension.

I've heard people say that the Trinity is like water in its three forms: steam, liquid, and ice. They've said that the Trinity is like the same person with three different titles: one woman who is a mother, a sister, and a daughter all at the same time. We try, but human illustrations will never accurately describe the indescribable, and human reason will never completely unfold the mysteries of God. So, this morning don't look for a neat, logical answer. Don't take this mystery of God that is the Trinity and try to wrap it all up in a way that's easy to understand, for the Trinity is a perfect example that when we try to put God in a box, He will kick out the sides every time! So, instead of considering every finite human analogy that falls miserably short of describing the infinite and Holy Creator of Heaven and Earth, let's open the Bible and read His story, the story of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the complete and perfect unity and intention in these three Persons as they manifest the infinite, indescribable love of God which begins in Him and with Him, and through Him overflows into the world.

Too often when we open the Bible our minds go directly to the questions of what and how, questions such as what is the Trinity and how do we understand this doctrine? As we consider God in three Persons this morning, I would suggest (for just a few minutes) that we disregard the what and how, and take a look at the question the Bible answers first, the question of Who. When we open our Bible to the first page, chapter one, verse one, we read, *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"* (Genesis 1:1). The first question is Who, and the answer is God. *"In the beginning God..."* Now listen to verse two, *"And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters"* (Genesis 1:2). Verse one introduces us to God, verse two continues this introduction with a vivid image of the Spirit of God moving upon the face of the waters, and as we continue to read verse three states, *"And God said, Let there be light..."* (Genesis 1:3).

In the first three verses of the Bible we recognize the distinction between the God who created the heaven and the earth, the Spirit of God who moved upon the face of the waters, and in verse three the Word of God who spoke light into the darkness at the time of creation, our Lord, *"the light of the world"* (John 8:12). The first question the Bible answers is Who, and all three Persons are right there in the first three verses of chapter one: God the Father,

God the Spirit, and God the Son. On this Trinity Sunday here is biblical truth worth remembering: Before any prophecy, before any promise, before it offers the answer to any question, the first four words of the Bible offer the answer to every question: *In the beginning God.*

The doctrine of the Trinity is not a dry concept or a philosophical argument, it is the story of God that tells us from the beginning, for all eternity, these three distinct Persons have existed in this perfect and personal relationship. So, as we seek to understand the Almighty and Triune God we begin to understand Him as a God for others, and the perfect way He loves another, the perfect way He loves us, is made known to us through His Word, His Beloved Son our Savior Jesus Christ.

With that thought in mind, let's begin again. Once again set aside the questions of what and how and just listen to the answer that the Bible provides first: Who. This time we open to chapter one, verse one, of the Gospel according to St. John and read these inspired words: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made*" (John 1:1-3). The Bible begins in the book of Genesis by answering the question of Who, and here we find that the Gospel of our Savior Christ according to St. John begins the same way and with the same answer: *In the beginning God.* The first few words of this passage echo the creation language found in Genesis, but the primary focus here is not creation. The primary focus of this passage is the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son through the Spirit that exists outside of creation. St. John, in a beautiful and powerful way, describes a relationship that not only existed at creation and throughout our Lord's earthly life and ministry, he describes a relationship and an interpersonal love that has always existed, that preceded creation, a love that transcends the limits of time, space, and creation.

This eternal, transcendent, Trinitarian love is the well from which we draw our love for God and neighbor. Due to the fact that *God is love*, and because He lives in us and we in Him, love is truly the definitive proof of our Christian discipleship. Jesus said, "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*" (John 13:35). If we love others, we

belong to Christ. If we have not love, (to use the words of St. Paul) we “*have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal*” (1 Corinthians 13:1). In 1 Corinthians, Paul declares that we are nothing without love because we are nothing without God, who is love, God who is an eternal Trinity of Persons living in an everlasting union of self-giving love.

The Bible is not a scientific textbook that offers dull, routine answers to the common questions of what and how. The Bible is a love story, a beautiful, heart-breaking love story that offers this answer to the question of Who: *In the beginning God*. One God in three distinct Persons. God the Father, who so loved the world that He gave His only Son (John 3:16). God the Son, who in love came down from heaven to lay down His life for His friends (John 15:13). God the Holy Spirit, who grieved as Christ was nailed to the Cross, who came like a “*rushing mighty wind*” on the day of Pentecost, and who is with us now to the end that we may be drawn into this communion of perfect, everlasting, self-giving love.

C.S. Lewis is correct, love is something that one person has for another person, and when we consider the story of our Salvation, the Father sending His Son and the Son’s freely given sacrifice through the Spirit, on this Trinity Sunday perhaps Lewis would allow us to say that love is not only something one person has for another person, love is something that one God in three Persons has for another person, for *God is love*, and you are His beloved.