

# The Long View of God

The First Sunday after Pentecost: Trinity Sunday,

May 27, 2018

Psalm 29, Isaiah 6:1-8, Romans 8:12-17, John 3:1-17

As many of you know, the only sporting event I care about starts in just a few hours. Today is the 102nd running of the Indianapolis 500, the largest single day sporting event in the world. Forgive me if I don't stay long after church. "Back Home Again in Indiana" is at 12:11, "Drivers start your engines" is at 12:12, and the green flag drops at 12:19. Once again, Indiana native and local favorite Ed Carpenter is on the pole. I'd love to see him win. Danica Patrick is back for the first time since 2011 and for the last time ever. She retires from auto racing after this race. She's starting inside row 3 next to Helio Castroneves and Scott Dixon, so that's a row to watch.

Though I'll enjoy the TV broadcast today, the best way to experience the race, in my opinion, is by radio. In Indianapolis, the race is not shown on TV live. Promoters have always worried that if people could watch it live they wouldn't fill the stands, and they have 400,000 tickets to sell. The TV contract lifts the blackout only in the event of a sell out. For most of my adult life, before moving here, I would jump in the car after church, turn on the radio, listen on the way home, come inside during a commercial, and follow the whole race that way. Then at night, I'd watch the televised rebroadcast and see the action.

I did attend in person one year just to check it out. And it was impressive. It is fun to sing "Back Home Again in Indiana" with hundreds of thousands of people. Nothing prepares you for the roar of the engines or how fast the cars really go. But honestly, I prefer radio. The announcers are seated high in the broadcast booth, on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor of the Pagoda. Additional announcers are in the turns, but the chief announcer can see and describe the whole track at once. Fans in the stands can see only one part of the track. On TV, the many announcers and different cameras compete for attention making it hard to take in the whole scene. In my humble opinion, the radio voice from on high, the one describing the whole race as it happens, gives you the best sense of the action below.

And in a way, what we do today on Trinity Sunday is like what the radio announcers will do today from the pagoda. We're trying to take it all in and describe what we see.

The first Sunday after Pentecost is set aside every year as Trinity Sunday. It's a little hard to know how to celebrate this day because it does not point to an event, like Christmas or Easter or Pentecost. Instead, it celebrates a doctrine, and there aren't clothes or gifts or foods for that. Even the scriptures we read on Trinity Sunday don't say much about the Trinity because the concept

emerged in its fullness after the scriptures were written. Though the seeds of the idea are in the scriptures, the word trinity never appears. The few times the phrase “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” shows up may have been later additions.

In other words, it took time for this vision of God as Trinity to emerge. The idea of the Trinity came into better focus when the church decided to climb up high, take a long view of God, and describe what we could see.

And this is what they saw. The early Christians knew God in many ways. They knew God the Creator, revealed to Israel as Yahweh, who set the Israelites free from slavery and gave the law through Moses. They knew Jesus as God incarnate, the divine in human form, who proclaimed the Kingdom of God, who lived and died and rose again. And they knew the Holy Spirit - the Spirit who enlivened the prophets and fell with power on the early church. The early Christians knew God in all of these ways.

So over a few decades as they took a long, long look at everything they knew about God, the church came to a remarkable conclusion: God is all of this – Creator and Jesus and the Holy Spirit all at once. It’s not that God was one way at the beginning, and then another way in Jesus, and another way now through the Holy Spirit. No. The doctrine of the Trinity confesses that God is Creator and Jesus and the Holy Spirit at the same time all the time throughout all history and forevermore. God is a coequal, eternal, indwelling relationship of all three.

As you might imagine, there were some arguments as this idea emerged. Some felt it lessened the majesty of God to say that Jesus and God were the same. They argued that God must have created Jesus. The division between the two groups became so heated that Emperor Constantine ordered all of the bishops to come together to settle the matter. They met at Nicea and worked out the Creed we still say today. One of the biggest arguments came down to one letter. They were discussing the phrase - “of one being with the Father.” You could also translate it “of one substance” – that God and Jesus are made of the same stuff. Some bishops wanted to add a little to the word– a single iota. That one letter would have changed the meaning to “of similar being” or “similar substance” to God. Some of the bishops, including one we know as St. Nicholas, nearly came to blows over this one letter. But the stronger language held. God and Jesus are the same. Of one being.

So today we celebrate a doctrine that is hard to explain but matters very deeply. Christians dare to confess that God is a relationship. When we say God is love, we don’t merely mean that God is loving or God shows us what love is like, though both are true. We mean something even more. God is love itself. God is made up of love. God is a relationship of love. The life of God is a co-eternal, co-equal, unending bond of love.

And because God is a relationship of love and the earth reflects God’s glory and we are created in the image of God, therefore the earth and all that are in it are made for love. Love is who we are. Love is how the world is put together. Love is how the world works best. When we do not

act in love we mess with the very foundation of creation and humanity and society. Because the God who made us is a relationship of love.

Our Presiding Bishop reminded us last week what love can do.

*When love is the way, then no child will go to bed hungry in this world ever again.*

*When love is the way, we will let justice roll down like a mighty stream and righteousness like an ever-flowing brook.*

*When love is the way, poverty will become history. When love is the way, the earth will be a sanctuary.*

*When love is the way, we will lay down our swords and shields, down by the riverside, to study war no more.*

Though we honor today those who died serving our country, no one wants anyone to suffer that. We want a world of love where war is history.

Love can do all of these things because God is a relationship of love. That's what we celebrate today.

In some seasons of the Christian year we sit in one part of the stands and look in one direction. Like the cameras in turns one, two, three or four, we sometimes focus one person of the Trinity at a time – Jesus at Easter, the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But today we climb the pagoda and try to take it all in. God in three persons. Blessed Trinity.

The idea of the Trinity often makes our minds spin, and that's okay. There are many things in this world that are hard to figure out. Our scriptures for today present two stories of people approaching something they couldn't fully understand. One is Nicodemus. Nicodemus was so confused. He knew Jesus was special but he couldn't make sense of it all. He came to Jesus at night so he could ask his questions freely. Jesus told him he needed to be born from above. Nicodemus could only think about normal earthly birth. You mean I have to enter my mother's womb and be born a second time? And while we praise Nicodemus for asking questions and trying to understand, sometimes the rational way of Nicodemus does not help us.

On this day, Isaiah shows us another way. Maybe the way to approach the Trinity is not to parse and dissect and debate. Maybe the way to approach the Trinity is to fall flat on our faces in awe. The Trinity is the object of our worship. On this day we see and celebrate God in God's fullness. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of your glory.

And when we do that, when we worship the Trinity that is God, like Isaiah we find ourselves sent – sent out by love to a world made for love to live the love that made us all.

Whom will I send and who will go for us?

What's the answer? Here I am. Send me.

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