

Trinity Sunday

Rev. Doug Floyd

Exodus 3:1-6, Psalm 93, Romans 8:12-17, John 3:1-16

Today we come to the center of our confession: the Trinity. It is often said that pastor usually invite someone else to preach on this day. I like to think about what Alister McGrath once said at a conference on the Trinity. He said, “The Trinity is not a problem to be solved but a mystery to be adored.” We come today with hearts open toward the goodness and mercy of God as we reflect upon the beauty of the Lord.

Karl Barth once offered a helpful way of beginning our reflection. He said, “The doctrine of the Trinity is simply a development of the knowledge that Jesus is the Christ or the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> We can only behold what has been revealed. Jesus Christ has been revealed as our Lord and Savior.

As the early disciples wrote the letters and Gospels we have today, they were reflecting upon their encounter with Jesus even as they faced the challenges all around them. The Holy Spirit was bringing all things to their remembrance, so they could effectively bear witness to the encounter with God in His goodness and grace.

Now we’ve already slipped into Triune language: Jesus Christ our Lord, the Holy Spirit, and the goodness and grace of God. What we behold and believe and proclaim is what has been revealed to us. We see God’s action in the world.

Now there are some things we don’t see. We don’t see the Father and we don’t see the Holy Spirit in the same way we see Jesus. The Father and the Spirit do not have physical bodies like Jesus. And yet, we do see or hear their action in the world.

---

<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Thomas F. Torrance, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part 1*, vol. 1 (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 334.

All through the Scriptures we encounter the Triune God in motion. In our first lesson, we read about Moses encountering a burning bush. Let's slowly walk through that story.

In Exodus 3:2 we read, "And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed."<sup>2</sup> What's the first thing Moses sees? The angel of the Lord. He appeared to Moses in a flame of fire coming out of the midst of the bush.

Throughout the Old Testament, the "Angel of the Lord" is often considered a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son of God. We don't refer to Him as Jesus because He has not been born of Mary and named Jesus. Think of the "Angel of the Lord" who meets Joshua, who announces the coming child Samson to Manoah and his wife, or who appears with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fire.

The Son of God take human form, but he does not fully enter into human flesh until the birth to Mary. Now the Word becomes Flesh and dwells among us. Jesus consistently points out that He has come to reveal the Father. In John 5:19, He states, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. <sup>20</sup> For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel."<sup>3</sup>

Jesus is revealing the Father. In fact, in Colossians 1, Paul writes, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in

---

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ex 3:2.

<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 5:19–20.

him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” <sup>4</sup>

When we behold Jesus, we behold the Father’s love and desire to reconcile His people. As our familiar passage in John reminded us, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”<sup>5</sup>

The Father speaks. He addresses in and through Christ. In and through Scripture, which opens our ears and eyes to Christ. He addresses when we hear the Word of God proclaimed. Hans Urs Von Balthasar has explained that we hear the proclaimed Word, the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit quickens our hearts to the truth. Our hearts burn within us.

In one sense, the Holy Spirit is tuning our hearts to hear the Word of the Lord. As we read Scripture, hear the proclaimed Word, worship in Spirit and in Truth, we are being converted or transformed. The word “convert” has to do with the movement of the heavens. It speaks of a seed being converted into a plant or a tree, and that tree bearing fruit. We are being converted into fruit-bearing trees. As Paul writes in Galatians 5:22-23, “[T]he fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” <sup>6</sup> This passage fits perfectly with our Romans passage today. “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but

---

<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 1:15–20.

<sup>5</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 3:16.

<sup>6</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ga 5:22–23.

you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” <sup>16</sup>The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup>and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”<sup>7</sup>

Let me read a little farther in Romans, and we will see that our conversion into fruit-bearing trees might also be characterized as children of God. The Father works in and through Christ by the power of the Spirit to redeem us and convert us into the children who will play a role in this glorious Triune symphony transforming all creation into glory.

<sup>18</sup>For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup>For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup>For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup>And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.<sup>8</sup>

We long for this day.

---

<sup>7</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:14–17.

<sup>8</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 8:18–23.

Now let me jump back to Moses as the burning bush and jump ahead to the Prodigal Son.

Moses stops, turns and faces the bush that is burning. Just as a reminder, in the Scripture, the Spirit often appears as some great force like fire or wind or even earthquake. Moses beholds a burning bush. The bush itself is not burning but the Spirit of holiness burns. Now the Father addresses Moses.

“When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”<sup>5</sup> Then he said, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”<sup>6</sup> And he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.”<sup>9</sup>

Here is the revelation of God as morally pure, which is distinct from the ancient gods. The Sumerian gods are making immorally bargains with humans.

What is Moses’s response to God’s holiness? Fear. It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Israel experiences this when God’s addresses them from the Holy Mountain. They ask Moses to speak with God for them from now on.

The Father speaks. The Son is the Word spoken. The Spirit opens our heart to hear this word. Or as Karl Barth said that the Father is revealer, the Son revelation, and the Spirit revealedness. The Triune God participates in all our encounters with Him, and we don’t see three persons.

In fact, we don’t see Jesus in the flesh. We see Jesus in the Word. Sometimes we see Jesus in God’s people. We see Jesus in worship and

---

<sup>9</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ex 3:4–6.

especially in the sacraments. What we see and experience is the life of the Triune God.

Now back to the Prodigal Son. Why did I put that picture on the cover of the bulletin? Jesus tells a story of a young man who wants his inheritance. His action amounts to wishing his father dead and publicly renouncing him. When he leaves the village, the town would have renounced him.

He experiences all the promises the world has to offer, and he is emptied out and virtually dead. In his desperate estate, he decides to return home and try and negotiate a deal with his father, so that he could return home.

Once the village heard of this return, they would have turned out to curse the son. To throw things at the son. To hurt him and disgrace him. But the Father sees the son coming from afar off.

Now as a side note: the Father being an Eastern Oriental Lord would have worn a long robe and would have walked slowly as was the custom that befit his dignity. But according to the story, he grabs the robe and ties it up around his waste, and runs to meet the son before he can even face the town's people.

Before the son can even negotiate, the father has restored him as a son, covered him with the royal robe, and given him the ring of authority.

If you want to grasp the glory of the Triune God, meditate upon this story. Jesus is giving us a picture of the Triune God in motion. And it is a thing to behold.

My only response is to lift up holy hands in awe, giving glory to the God of Gods and Lord of Lords.