

# Sermons at Union Congregational Church

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May 27, 2018

Trinity Sunday

John 3:1-17

Romans 8:12-17

***Trinity = Love***  
***Church = Love***

The Trinity - God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit - can be difficult to wrap our minds around. So I thought I'd share a short video that might help:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBRpeq9dVe4>

No matter how many scholarly tomes are written about the Trinity, no one can completely understand it. It falls into the category of things we have to believe or accept without fully understanding it.

And the older I get, the more comfortable I get with the fact that there are some things about God that I will never fully understand. God is greater, more powerful, more mysterious and even more loving than we could ever imagine or explain or describe.

Sure we can come up with formulas and explanations about God, but when we do that we hem him in and restrict him only to what we know and can understand. And as soon as we do that, God is no longer the God of majesty, power and grace, but something less than all that.

When we reduce the Trinity to a bad analogy, we lose the magnificence and glory of God that Isaiah experienced in our first reading.

That's why Jesus says that we're to have the faith of a little child. He's not meaning we should be childish, but rather childlike. You know how kids are in awe and wonder at everyday things, and accepting of what they are told. We're to trust God who has made us, redeemed and sustained us.

Take Nicodemus. He is trying to understand God. He has come to Jesus because he wants to understand. Good for him! But when Jesus starts talking about the kingdom of heaven, and baptism and the Holy Spirit, all he could say was, "How can this be?"

What Jesus tells Nicodemus about the work of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in his life appeared to be simple and straightforward. And yet Nicodemus finds it difficult to understand the mysterious relationship between the persons of the Triune God.

And so it begins! And ever since...Creeds and books have been written attempting to explain God in language that everyone can understand, but finally we have to simply stop our attempts to push God into our molds and stand in faith and wonder and marvel at the mystery of God.

Because we'll never know everything about God, which is OK. Just as you don't need to know everything about how a car works to enjoy the ride.

And whereas the WHO eludes our understanding, the WHAT and the HOW and the WHY are more within reach. The fact that God is three in one means that God is primarily about relationship. God is relational. It's at the core of who God is, but also it's at the core of what God does, and what God needs the church to be.

The Trinity changes how we live our lives, how we recognize the presence of the Kingdom of God in the world. And it means that the church is fundamentally about relationship and relationships. Not a building but a way of being in the world.

The Trinity insists that relationship is what truly matters, that relationship is what becomes the example of what faith looks like in the world. You could even say our relationships are the test for us in the church as to whether or not we are actually Trinitarian.

Our faith may be personal - in that it is unique for each of us - but it can't be private, meant only for our own edification. It's always about relationship.

The Trinity gives us a glimpse of what can be if relationship is at the heart of who and what the church strives to be. As Trinitarians we experience the love of God in relationships that are good and whole and solid and loving.

Because love is really what it's all about. Did you see the Royal wedding sermon a week ago? It went viral! (Imagine that - a sermon going viral! Be sure to watch it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gonlKodrmk>) And the whole point of his sermon is this: If it's not about love, it's not about God.

"For God so **loved** the world..." Probably the most popular verse in the Bible. And then there's the verse that comes next, John 3:17, which might be the world's most overlooked Bible verse: "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

God is not vengeful, not demanding of judgment or appeasement, not angry, but loving. Just plain loving. And the cross is not a mechanism to appease God or satisfy God's justice or thirst for blood, but rather is the sign of just how far God will go to show us that God already loves us. There is nothing God will not do for us in love.

And the resurrection promises that God's love is more powerful than all things, even death.

And it doesn't end there. Our reading from Romans 8: through the Spirit and out of love, God has adopted us His own beloved children who now are heirs of all good things. God doesn't see the mistakes or regrets or missteps or disappointments. God only sees goodness. Why? Because God **is** love and **loves us**.

If we were going to use love to explain the Trinity, it might go like this: the Father is one who loves, the Son the beloved, and the Spirit is the love shared between them. No, it doesn't adequately explain the Trinity, but it does help us imagine and remember that the whole point of the Trinity is relationships based in love.

And that God's love is too big, too immense, even, to be described as the love of a single person, but is more like the love shared among a community, a love shared so deeply that it can't be contained but spills out from the Trinity into our lives. And through us and our church into our community and the world beyond.

When we say we're a Trinitarian church, we often are distinguishing ourselves from the Unitarian church and what we believe about who God is. But it's got to be about more than that. When we say we're Trinitarian we're also saying that relationships are the most important thing about us, and even more specifically - relationships that radiate love for others more than ourselves.

So what does that look like?

It looks like our knitting group knitting prayer shawls for others - including little pouches for babies who are stillborn.

It looks like the Confirmation classes sharing home communion with Bert Tompkins a number of years ago; and having dinner with Charlie Elwood more recently so they could experience the faith of these great men first hand.

It looks like our Harvest Fair profit making a real difference in the lives of those in recovery or without homes.

It looks like providing 250 backpacks to children who are living on the edge.

A few weeks ago, I suggested three questions to guide our identity as a church:

Are we including everyone?

Are we valuing people over things?

Are we caring for others more than ourselves?

A Trinitarian Church makes relationships that demonstrate God's love the priority.

We print it on the front page of our bulletin every week:

*Sharing Christ ~ Changing Lives*

*Creating a Christian foundation for families*

*Learning more about Jesus*

*Living our faith beyond our walls*

We started with Donnell and Connell and Patrick and the confusion of the doctrine of the Trinity; and we've ended with the simple mandate to love. It doesn't need to be complicated!

If the Trinity = love (and it does), then the Church = love as well.

Amen.