

“God in Three Persons”

Romans 5:1-5

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Hundreds, maybe thousands of books have been written to explain the Doctrine of the Trinity. I’ve read about half of them. As soon as one book on the Trinity is published, another is being written to expose the inadequacies of the previous effort. It seems that every theologian has his or her own way of understanding this mystery of how God can be three persons in one. From early childhood, I recall singing with gusto the hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy,” a hymn which ends with the familiar words, “God in three persons, blessed Trinity.” We sang them earlier this morning.

I’ve been thinking about our daughter. She lives with her husband and two children over in Vernon. I love spending time in their home. And what I witness there is that sometimes she needs to be the creative, nurturing force that gives birth to life and to ideas and to imagination. But at other times, she needs to be involved as a reconciler, as one who steps into the midst of a sibling rivalry with an understanding heart, as one who calls her children to a high standard of ethics. Still, at other times, she jump shifts into the voice that stirs things up, that invites change and newness, that calls her family out of its comfort zone. It’s as if she were three persons in one!

So, this is how I have come to understand the Trinity, God in three persons. One person is the Creator. One person is the Reconciler. One person is the Provoker. You might know these three as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or as Mother, Child, and Heavenly Dove.

For me, it is God the Creator who pushes me to the art galleries, who has me open the saxophone case and wet the reed and blow into it, who dares me onto the dance floor, who suggests I write a poem, who makes me curious about cooking with tofu, who stimulates what we used to call my creative juices. God the Creator not only creates but also releases the energy for creative thinking and creative expression.

It is God the Creator I am relating to when I look at Hopper's painting, "Night Hawks." It is God the Creator I am relating to when I read a poem by Kathleen Housley or Sandy Sergio or Andy Weatherwax. It is God the Creator I am relating to when I awake with a dream and wonder what that dream is all about.

The psalmist understood this quite well. In Psalm 51 we read: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me."

Whenever you feel an urge to cross a Russet potato with a Kennebeck, or whenever you feel the urge to mold some clay, or whenever you feel the urge to capture a sunset on film or on canvass or in a song, you are drawing upon the gifts of the Creator, the first person of the Trinity.

For me, the second person of the Trinity is God the Reconciler, the Christ, who takes me by the hand and leads me to situations of brokenness, to frazzled relationships, to circumstances that appear to be hopeless, to places where new life is needed, where the promise of Resurrection can be offered. In so many Gospel stories, it is Christ who encounters people who have separated themselves from their own selves, or who have separated themselves from their parents, or who have separated themselves from their true purpose.

The second person of the Trinity meets the brokenhearted ones in their grief; meets the incarcerated one in the cell, meets the addicted one in the support group; meets the terrified one under the mattress.

The second person of the Trinity we call Christ. Situations that you and I look at and label as irredeemable Christ looks at and says, "I can do something about this."

It is Christ who brings traditional enemies to the peace talks; hostile neighbors to the kitchen table; long time adversaries to beating their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

I am sure it was the Christ who huddled with my mother and father and me the night of that horrible day when I set fire, accidentally, to their house and couldn't imagine ever being forgiven.

Whenever we reach that moment when it seems time to let go of that grudge or to make amends or to let bygones be bygones, I believe it is the Christ who is there melting the heart, opening the door, providing the language that allows somebody to have an experience of grace. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see." It is this second person of the Trinity who welcome the prodigal child home, who extends a second chance, who rejoices whenever anyone claims the more excellent way, the way of love.

The third person of the Trinity likes to shake things up, likes to move the church community from placidness to restlessness, from idleness to engagement, from complacency to mission. We call this third person the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that provokes us to action when we witness an injustice.

It is the Holy Spirit that shakes our cage when we hear a racial slur or a disrespectful comment and makes us confront that disrespect. The Holy Spirit gives us courage to shingle a roof with Habitat for Humanity or to haul a load of sweet corn to FoodShare or to tutor an adult in English as a second language.

The Holy Spirit breathes a sacred breath of power into our souls enabling us to take on leadership roles; enabling us to say YES I'll coordinate the Wednesday School suppers! YES I'll organize the Coffee Ministry; YES, I'll take the lead with refugee resettlement; YES, I'll make that new animal ministry happen; YES, I'll go to Malawi and play with children orphaned by AIDS; YES, I'll lead the next stewardship campaign to fund all the mission work God is calling us to accomplish.

The Holy Spirit breathes a sacred breath of power into our souls like a mighty wind blows power into the sails of a schooner. This third person of the Trinity elbows the couch potato off the sofa; elbows the shy guy onto the dance floor; elbows the hesitant one to the soup kitchen.

I believe it was the Holy Spirit who elbowed Hunter Kramer to leave his apron at the bar where he mixed drinks for a living to become an English teacher in Africa where he is making a significant difference in the quality of life for 1000 students at his rural school.

There is but one God. In the world of Christianity, we say we experience God as three persons all rolled into one. It is our common experience of God as a Creator, as a Reconciler, and as a Provoker that allows us to sing with gusto "God in three persons, blessed Trinity." It is our common experience of God that lets us live each day in the greatest of hope. Amen.