Today is Trinity Sunday, and that makes this is our official feast day. Happy feast day! If you look around, Trinity symbols abound in this sacred building.

The Church sets aside Trinity Sunday for preaching about this ancient — and sometimes obtuse — doctrine of the Trinity. It is perhaps no accident that the Church saves this teaching moment for the start of summer vacations.

In many churches, the task of explaining the Trinity falls to a seminarian. It’s kind of a rite passage: Let’s see how fast the seminarian gets into trouble with an explanation that crosses into a heresy.

But since we have no seminarian, you get me.

The task is to make what sounds like three gods fit back into the package of one God.

Let’s see how quickly I can get into trouble.

Basically, the Trinity is the idea that God is revealed in three equal persons:

- God the Father – the creator of all things, the spark of life;
- God the Son, who lives among as a human being as Jesus, the Christ, which means the anointed one who heals and saves us from ourselves; and
- God the Holy Spirit, who blows like the wind everywhere, and leads us and continues to bless us.

The three are described in classical theology as “persons” because the Trinity is alive, though not exactly persons like us.

Got it? Everyone understand? Done.

Well, let’s go a little further.

How do we think of God as three-in-one?

Trinity analogies abound: water, ice, steam. A shamrock with three leaves, or a hypothetical three-sided diamond pointed at one end. One side is the Father, another the Son, and another the Holy Spirit.

No matter which face of the diamond you look into, you still see God at the center of the diamond.

You might see more clearly through one side of the diamond than someone else who is looking through another side of the diamond. That’s OK. You both still seeing and connecting with God.
I have a pebble that I call my “Trinity stone.” I found it on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is pointed at both ends and has three sides, and I often hold it when saying my morning prayers. No matter which side of the stone I hold, I feel I am somehow connected to God.

All of these images and analogies say something helpful about how something can be one-in-three and three-in-one.

However, all of these analogies fall short in at least three important ways:

First, these analogies are static. The three sides don’t actually do anything except have three sides or three ways of existing.

Second, none of these analogies say anything about how the three relate to each other. They leave the impression that God switches modes at three different times – water, ice, steam. That, by the way, is an ancient heresy called “modalism.”

The third problem is: None of these analogies say anything about why we should care.

What difference does it make if we understand God through the concept of the Holy Trinity? How is life different?

This is a fair question. So, let’s see what we can do with this.

I would suggest to you that the concept of the Trinity is crucial because – and this will sound paradoxical – the Trinity can free us from the shackles of rigid dogma and hierarchy.

We are perhaps accustomed – too accustomed – of thinking of God in masculine, hierarchal terms, an idea deeply embedded in Christian culture.

For most of our history, the Church has been understood as a rigid command-and-control hierarchy like an army – and a male dominated hierarchy at that – with archbishops, presiding bishops, diocesan bishops, priests, deacons, and lay people.

That hierarchy mirrors a way of viewing God as an old man with a long beard hovering above us in the clouds – as a harsh father figure occasionally tossing thunderbolts at us when we mess up.

That way of viewing God makes Jesus, the softie, into something of an assistant God, bailing us out of trouble.

And that makes the Holy Spirit the cleanup guy who tidies up after all the messes left behind by the other two.

But if we can see the Trinity not as hierarchy, but rather, as three equal entry ways into a relationship with God, we might just see ourselves, and the Church and the world in a different way free from rigid hierarchies.
The idea of the Trinity is another way of saying that all living things are capable of experiencing God, each in our limited way, yet God is bigger than any of us can experience in only one way.

This is not a new idea.

In the 1400s, the great English mystic Julian of Norwich wrote of experiencing the immensity of the Trinity in something as small as a hazelnut in her hand. She said she felt “enclosed” in the Holy Trinity, who she described as her “father” and her “mother.”

“And the deep wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother, in whom we are enclosed. And the high goodness of the Trinity is our Lord, and in him we are enclosed and he in us.” *

For Julian, the God of Trinity is the Infinite One who is the holy spark of life within us and dwelling in all things. There is no hierarchy in Julian’s way of describing God as the Trinity.

That Julian describes the Trinity as “mother” is not as odd as you might think: The ancients used the Greek word “numina” to describe the Spirit, which also means “wind,” and note that numina is a feminine word.

By the way, when reciting the line in the Nicene Creed about the Holy Spirit, some people say “she” instead of “he.” You might want to try that on yourself today: “With the Father and the Son, she is worshipped...”

Julian is describing God who transcends all the human-made shackles of physical abilities, social status, age, race, gender, and everything else that tries to put us in a box.

This is not about the nature of God in heaven but is about the nature of God in the world, and that makes this an invitation to a relationship with the God of love.

To grasp this invitation, you need look no further than this table. It is no accident that the central locus of our worship is the sharing of a sacred meal – our Holy Eucharist.

Jesus tells us we will experience the holiness of the Trinity, especially when we gather as a circle of faith at his table, share this meal, making real for us God’s blessing on the night before he died.

There is no seating chart at Jesus’s table. No rank, no privilege, no hierarchy. Everyone matters. Everyone is important.

Jesus invites us to bring to this table our joys and sorrows, our faith and doubts, our gifts – and our wounds.

Bring yourself as you are.

When we gather at this table, we enter the prayers of generations. Everyone we love, who see no longer, is here with us, surrounding us with their prayers.
And we are surrounded and connected with all, through all time, by the Trinity: God who creates us; Jesus who heals us; and the Holy Spirit, who us even now blessing and guiding us.

Saint Paul, in his letter to the Romans which we read today, puts this simply: “God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

Today, listen for the Spirit guiding us, for he – and she – has much more to give us.

AMEN

*Thanks to the Rev. Suzanne Guthrie’s blog for the Julian quote and the inspiration: http://www.edgeofenclosure.org/trinityabc.html