

Dinner With A Perfect Stranger
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Today is the first Sunday after Pentecost. It is also Trinity Sunday. *In my Notes from Gail*, I mentioned that we needed to address $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. So we are to look at God as one in three and three in one. This is not a scientific or mathematical equation, It is an equation of faith. I hope that you go home today comforted in your knowledge and understanding of the Trinity.

John Wesley, our founder of Methodism, did not want the American church to be beholden to creeds that could divide people rather than unite them to a common cause. Thus, he eliminated the famous Nicene Creed from the services he sent from England to the services to be used by we Americans.

The Nicene creed, and if you later want to read the full text it is #880 in the hymnal, contains the phrases, and let me emphasize these are small phrases from the Creed... "We believe in God the Father...We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God...We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life." So there you have it. A Creed that states we believe in The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It's no wonder that John Wesley eliminated this from worship. He did not want a church based upon creeds. This Creed could clearly cause divisions in the church based on our personal beliefs. Can you see how this could be a dividing point of the Church?

Let's look at some ways of saying the Trinity:

Traditionally we have :
God... The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit
Alternatively, you could say:
God... Parent, Child and Love
or
God...Gives, Receives, Enables
or
God...use your own words!

Regardless of the words used, thinking about rather than just accepting the Trinity is difficult for me. I grew up with the phrase "the Holy Ghost." That may have been the start of my questioning the Trinity, as ghosts scared me. And Caspar the friendly ghost was just on TV. When I heard the word 'The Holy Spirit' I became

much more comfortable. Language is so important. In my case, a young child couldn't embrace the Holy Ghost, but the Holy Spirit made perfect sense.

But wherever we are on the subject of the Trinity, we can have a relationship with God. And that is the most important. As people, we are far more with God than without God. Whatever our relationship with God and the Trinity, we are grounded in our humanness and thus in our personal struggles. God in three persons.

Our closest Christian relatives are the Jews and the Muslims as we all have roots that go back to Abraham. Some Jews and Muslims feel Christianity has rejected monotheism (one God) for tri-theism (three Gods). Although we know this not to be true, the argument is that the word *person* as used as God in three *Persons* takes us away from one, monotheistic God.

Are we trying to know too much? Perhaps we ought to just accept that we have a monotheistic God who is expressed as God in the persons.

Earlier it was announced that we are going to have a new pastor. We'll have to ask her what she thinks of the Trinity!

But let's move from this complex Trinity discussion and on to this week's Scripture and how it ties in. We heard what to many may be their favorite verse in the Bible, John 3:16. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." It is easy to see why people love this verse, books have been written around the verse, and some people believe that the entire Gospel is contained in this verse.

It is not difficult to see why this verse is so appealing. The greatest realities of our world are packed in this succinct verse. God. Love. The world. Jesus. Faith. Perish. Eternal life. There again is our Trinity found in the verse – God, Jesus and Love. Let me read the verse again so that we all can hear these truths. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

At the beginning of the passage, from John, Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a leader of the Jews. I was struck by his coming to Jesus by night where he could not be seen. For true believers come when it is light to receive God's saving judgment. Regardless, Nicodemus came to see Jesus when it was dark.

Nicodemus listens to Jesus but he does not hear the message. Jesus sparks Nicodemus' interest with a spiritual metaphor of a new birth. He misunderstands. Then Jesus clarifies the spiritual significance. Still, Nicodemus does not understand. Jesus again clarifies his message and mildly rebukes Nicodemus. Finally Jesus reveals himself to be the Son of Man, the Son of God and the light. Jesus did not give up on Nicodemus for God sent Jesus into the world to save it, not to condemn the world.

I recently read the book *Dinner With a Perfect Stranger: An Invitation Worth Considering* written by David Gregory. Can you imagine how you would feel and what you would do if you received an invitation in the mail that was not signed, had no return address, was to be at the finest restaurant in town...and the invitation said your host was Jesus of Nazareth? Would you take the risk and meet with someone claiming to be Jesus or write it off as a practical joke?

Well, after much internal struggle Rick decided to go. But he still thought it was a lot of hooey hooey. What followed was amazing. Jesus did not preach to Rick. Rather, he answered Rick's sometime hostile questions. With each course of the meal, more was revealed about Rick's life, often through Jesus. And Jesus revealed more about himself.

Rick and Jesus have reached the point where they are talking about eternal life. To quote Rick, "You know, I've never really understood that whole Trinity thing. Father, Son, Holy Spirit..." Jesus smiled, saying "Join the Crowd. You aren't meant to understand it."

I would like to add one comment to that - I believe in the Trinity and continue to try to understand it. It's my nature. Whatever your feelings and beliefs about the Trinity, they are right for you. And that's what matters.

Amen