

Trinity Sunday – June 12, 2022
Thankful Memorial Episcopal Church
Chattanooga, Tennessee

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שמע ישראל יהוה אלהנו יהוה אחד

Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is *one*. This is Hebrew prayer is known as the “*Shemah*,” and it is the centerpiece of Jewish liturgy, the “watchword” of the Jewish people. Observant Jews recite this prayer twice daily, and it is traditional in Judaism to recite this prayer as one’s last words before death. “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is *one*.” It is a statement of intense monotheism, and therefore perhaps a strange place to begin a sermon for Trinity Sunday. But we begin here, because as Christians, we believe this to be a true statement. Like our Jewish kindred, we can safely begin, and perhaps even end with this affirmation: We believe in *one* God.

And yet, as Trinitarian Christians, we cannot simply dwell in that statement—there must be more to it. For we believe in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As the Athanasian Creed states, “*We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Essence. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son; and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal.*” It is excellent and mysterious theology and incoherent, nonsensical math. As a concept, the Trinity is humanly impossible to understand. But fear not. Like Jacob at the river Jabbok, the goal of our wrestling with God is not necessarily to understand. Rather, we wrestle with our triune God to gain blessing. And the Trinity blesses us with many lessons. By its very being, the Trinity teaches us about community, about loving, and about humility.

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus speaks of the Father and the Spirit with a sense of intense community. “The Spirit will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine.” Here we see the Spirit freely taking and giving the truth and mystery that belong to the Father and the Son to share it with humanity. Among the three persons is a union, a love so perfect that they cannot be divided. And from their love, truth pours forth to humanity while humanity is drawn into that love. The Trinity, in its very being, teaches us how to live and love in community. This is the God in whose image we were made—we ourselves were made for community. It is only in community that we gain our deepest insights into the Trinity, because it is in community that we truly learn to love.

In the reading from Proverbs, we hear the voice of Wisdom personified. She sings out beautifully how she watched the world being created in an epic love song. “*I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.*” In creation, in humanity, we see something of the nature and love of God. We all share a common humanity—we are one people—and yet diverse, a great variety of colors and

languages, of cultures and worldviews. Particularly, when I think of our non-binary kindred, those gender renegades who identify by the singular “they,” I am reminded of a love that transcends understanding. While I may not understand an existence beyond gender, I love them. And because I love them, I can believe that they are who they say they are, even when I don’t understand. So, with the Trinity, which ever illudes our full understanding, we can believe that this indescribable triune is the God revealed to us through scripture and creation. Though we may not understand, we can love, and that love leaves space for God to be Godself without our needing to impose the limits of our understanding upon him. It is this liberating love that frees us to love with courageous humility.

Though there is much that we learn from the Trinity, the nature of God is more mystery than logic. Our God is so big, so wonderous, so playfully enigmatic that even our most clever philosophies, our most eloquent poetry, our most brilliant science must in the end fail to capture all that is the triune LORD. Our theorizing, as worthwhile as it may be, must eventually and humbly give way to pure doxology, to praise. The psalmist today sings, “*Out of the mouths of infants and children your majesty is praised above the heavens.*” In the family of God, we never fully complete the process of “growing up.” We are all, from the newest to the oldest among us, ever his beloved children. And like the children we are, we are called to approach our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirt, not with wit, but with wonder. And at the point of childlike wonder, we come to realize that the truest thing we can say about the Triune God is the sound of sheer, awed silence.

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Amen.