

W Thomas – Trinity Sunday - Christ Episcopal Church, Elizabeth City NC – June 15, 2025

So, after we read the words at the beginning of our liturgy, Almighty and everlasting God, you have given to us your servant's grace by the confession of a true faith to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity and in the power of your divine majesty to worship the unity. Oh my goodness, this is Trinity Sunday. So, if that wasn't enough, later when we pray the Eucharistic prayer, you'll hear in the preface, for with your co-eternal Son and Holy Spirit, you are one God, one Lord in Trinity of persons and in unity of being.

And we celebrate the one and equal glory of you, oh Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Y'all got it? Smooth, right? It's not that easy, but it is perhaps a doctrine that is sublime and beautiful that if we allow ourselves to find a tiny entrance into it, we might just apprehend some more of God's glory and God's love for us. So, here's the sermon.

I think the sermon, this sermon takes a fluid memory that often seems more like a dream, but is really an invitation to let the doctrine be a door that opens to the embrace, to embrace the love that is the Trinity as we experience and share God as lover, beloved, and breath of love. There's a story. Yes, we have experienced the doctrine part already, probably hit it again, but more to the point, I will then bring in perhaps some language and imagery that has helped me along with the story that might be of use to you.

And so, here we go. When somebody says to you, what's with this three gods you worship? You go, no, no, no, it's one God in Trinity, and then their eyes glaze over when you try to explain it as best you can, and whatever you've heard. So, one day I was given a gift from God.

It's the best way I can explain it, because it was one of those, may the blessing of God find you when you least expect it and need it most moments. I was on the point into a lake, standing there waiting for the Boy Scouts to show up. I was serving as the chaplain of the local scout camp in the Tuscaloosa area, the Black Warrior Council.

And on Thursdays, all the scouts would troop in for evening chapel, and I would lead them through evening chapel, and they were running evidently a little bit late. And so, here we are. I'm looking out at this vast expanse of a beautiful lake, and even though I'm an adult, I'm in my short pants, and doing my scout stuff, and I'm feeling a little bored waiting for them to show up.

What do you do? I picked up some pebbles. And I took one, and I threw it in a high arc into the lake, and I watched it fall. And then, all of a sudden, I noticed the water started to ripple out.

I said, well, that's kind of fun. So I took another pebble that I had, and I threw it a little bit to the left. And it fell, and it started to ripple out.

And the first ripple was still somewhat noticeable, but was beginning to dissipate. The second ripple was still there, and then I got theologically excited. I took the third stone, and I threw it a little bit to the right of the first one.

It's like, argh! Pshh! Rippling coming out. And all of a sudden, I had an image of the Trinity. And the image began with the immenseness, the hugeness of something that might be bigger than I could understand in the essence of the lake and the water.

But when I threw the first stone up, I saw something for the moment. And I could go through my doctrinal understanding that I did at the time of thinking of it as, oh, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Creator, second one, Redeemer, Sanctifier. So I could begin to imagine my names, the names I've been trained to basically understand, my small entrance into trying to understand the hugeness that is God.

Because I could see it for a moment, and it disappeared. That's one of the problems with theology. We can see it for a moment, and then it disappears.

So we create some kind of a doctrine in which to hold on to it. And then we get so wrapped up in the doctrine, we forget about what it was calling us in to learn more deeply about, to be open as fully as possible to what God has to offer. So upon reflection, I kept thinking, well, the lake is clearly the immenseness of God.

And in the moments I can see things, but it all recedes back to what it always was, which is another way of reminding us that God always was, always will be. It's a time thing for us. That's our problem.

So Jesus has always been, Holy Spirit has always been, because the dance that is God is dancing in love. Can you imagine? This is where it gets really kind of weird. Can you imagine this love dancing amongst itself? It's so perfect in harmony, whatever, but that's what God is.

And sometimes we feel or experience God in certain ways. And we try to get a name that makes us more comfortable. You may have friends that are basically Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, everything Jesus.

That's the comfort place of trying to understand the immenseness of God. There's nothing wrong with that, but there's a hugeness. A few years ago, I came across a Franciscan theologian named Ilia Delio.

And she posited this understanding of God as complete and full relationship with these words, which have helped me. And I've mentioned them once already in the opening statement, but basically think of it this way. What we might call creator is lover.

What we might call redeemer is beloved. And building upon what Anne preached on last week with the notion of breath, hesed, and whatever, the notion of spirit as breath of love. Breath of love being breathed in and through all of us.

And so we're dealing with something that is greater than we can ask or imagine, but in such a way that it gives us what Paul calls for, and that hope, that perseverance, that moving forward, if we but are open to the love that is God that we have found in Jesus Christ, the beloved, when we see the hand of the creator as the lover, and then we realize as we live our lives, perhaps the best way we can be is an extension of the breath of love that comes and helps all feel the fullness and richness that God has to offer us or as we pray in the Lord's Prayer. Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. We're not waiting for this crazy end time that always feels like an end time, but it's actually the time when love is shared that we know the fullness of heaven on earth.

And so I offer you this image of one that's given me a great sense of what goes on, and if you want to test it, next time you buy a big body of water, take three pebbles, throw them up in the air, and see what happens, all right? If you do this at home, be careful, you might break something, all right? And then at the same time, kind of sit quietly. The image that I posted the other day, it'll be back up, I'm with the trefoil, the typical way of doing it. Just try to pull your eyes and squint some more and just have that sense of, oh my gosh, it's lover.

Beloved, breath of love moving in, away, and that's why that image is so cool, because you can't figure out where it starts or ends. It's one of those clever graphics, but it's true. And so I leave you with that as an invitation this week to perhaps ponder how love has reached you and how you might be an extension of that love with others.

All these words I offer in the name of God, lover, beloved, breath of love. Amen.