

“Family Ties”
Romans 8:12-17

To coin a popular P.S.A., the following is a test. For the next few seconds consider what happens at the very beginning of the service. In particular, what do I do as the worship leader and I approach the chancel area? Pour water in the baptismal font. Why? Well, it is *intended* to remind us of one of our two foundational sacraments which relates to our very identity as Christians. **Baptism.** It is this holy ordinance that signifies our being one with Christ in his baptism, and one with each other in this community of baptized believers. Every day, when we splash water on our face in the morning, or take a shower (hopefully more than on Saturday night 😊) we should be mindful of those vows made at our baptism: we are sinners in God’s eyes, without hope save for his mercy. Mercy made flesh in our Savior Jesus Christ. And in response to the love shown us in Christ, we are to live lives that demonstrate to God our gratitude for his saving mercy and love. Baptism is a sign of our being grafted into the living body of Christ, the church... God’s **family**.

As we ponder our membership in the family of God, we might also reflect on the name that we are baptized with. NO, not our given names... not merely those ‘proper nouns’ that include a middle name that you are happy most no one knows except close family... but rather, the name by which other should really know you by... that ‘family name’ by which Christ instructed His followers were to be ‘adopted’— **“baptizing them in the name of Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.”** (Matthew 28:19) (Or, as sometimes referred to, the ‘Holy Ghost.’ I much prefer ‘Spirit’... I think that term ‘ghost’ reminds us too much of Halloween or Casper). It is these three persons of the One GOD that we worship that are also referred to as the “Trinity.” Not the celery, onion, and bell pepper variety...but the HOLY Trinity. Capital ‘T.’

Today, of course, is that ‘high holy day’ on our church calendar in which we, along with both Catholic and Protestant churches, celebrate **Trinity Sunday**. Unlike all of our other ‘holy days’... Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, for example... this is the ONLY one that does NOT focus on a particular **event**, but rather, a **doctrine**. A fundamental principle of what we believe that

undergirds, permeates ALL of those other days. Trinity Sunday, in coming immediately following Pentecost, the birth of the church, could be considered to be part of our 'commissioning', the 'vows' that we make in our 'baptism', as we go 'out into the world' from that birth. Because of its singular nature of THE day devoted to a particular doctrine, clearly the concept of a 'Triune God' is a VERY important one.

WHY? As 'Christians,' shouldn't we be all about 'CHRIST?' I mean, after all, can't our faith be summed up in those famous initials, 'WWJD'... 'What Would Jesus Do?' Well... there is *certainly* something to be said in favor of holding up our own everyday actions against those of our Lord and Savior. But it's also about 'WWJS'... 'What Would Jesus SAY?' Did Jesus say, 'It's all about me. I'm all you need.'?

NO! Throughout the Gospels Jesus speaks of a GOD that is greater, larger than simply Himself. In John's Gospel Jesus proclaimed that ***"I and the Father are one."*** (John 10:30) Later, in one of His prayers, Jesus would declare that ***"You, Father, are in me and I am in you."*** (John 17:20) But He would also mention a third 'partner in ministry'... a very vital component to our salvation.

In one of our other lectionary passages, Jesus told Nicodemus, a highly regarded leader of the Jews, that ***"no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit."*** (John 3:5) The same Spirit, along with the Father, present at the baptism of Jesus: ***"...the Spirit of God descending like a dove and resting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*** (Matthew 3:16-17) (Yet another verse 3:16 of great significance!) While the word "Trinity" may not appear anywhere in the Scriptures, the concept of "God in three persons, (a) blessed Trinity" (as we sang earlier) is present throughout the whole of Scriptures, from Genesis to Revelation. Jesus did NOT say, 'Baptize them in my name alone'... but, ***"baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."***

NOW, while we may not be able to fathom just HOW in the world... or, more accurately, how in ALL of creation...these three distinct Persons can 'co-exist' in ONE God (that's why they call it a 'holy MYSTERY'), I DO believe that we can gain some insights into how the 'NATURE' of these Persons of the Trinity can indeed inform how we are to live as followers of that 'triune

God.’ Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit demonstrate a powerful example of ‘teamwork,’ ‘working together for our good,’ we too can embody their character traits as we exhibit ‘teamwork’ in striving to ‘work together for the good’ of one another as the ‘children of God.’ “**Family ties**” that the Trinity possesses, that we may as well.

Our first ‘family tie,’ the FIRST person of the Trinity, is God the Father... our **PROTECTOR**. Paul wrote that “*you did NOT receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, BUT you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!”¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God...*” (Romans 8:15-16)

When you or I are able to cry out ‘Abba Father,’ it is not through our human wills alone. It is not *because* of the good image... or in *spite* of the bad one... that we might have of an earthly father. It is God’s Spirit that convicts us that we are children of God. A child not born merely of human flesh, but adopted by our heavenly Father. Chosen by God of his own will and love for us. We are not merely servants of some tyrannical ruler in the heavens... nor some puppets on the end of a marionette’s string... but a heavenly Father who is always there to **Love** us... to **Care** for us... to **free** us from the **bondage of fear**... To **PROTECT** US.

This is NOT to say that harm will never befall us. For we live in a broken and sinful world, in which the powers of evil are at work, both AROUND us and IN us. But the God who has promised never to leave us, nor forsake us, will always be there to pick up the pieces of our brokenness. When we cry ‘Abba, Father,’ we can be sure that our adoptive ‘Daddy’ will be there... working in ways that we cannot see.

We must be mindful that one of the best ways that our Heavenly Father ‘works in unseen ways’ is through US! Particularly in those ways that we ourselves have been broken, and can help others in THEIR brokenness. I would challenge each one of you to ponder just how YOU are showing ‘Abba love’ to others. How are you ‘caring’ for the helpless... ‘freeing from the bondage of fear’ the hopeless ... ‘protecting’ those who are hurting?

Our second ‘family tie,’ the Second person of the Trinity is **God the Son**... our **PARTNER** in ministry. In the 17th verse, Paul writes that “*If (we are) children, then heirs... heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.*” (Romans 8:17)

By virtue of being adoptive children of God, that makes us 'stepbrothers' and sisters, so to speak, of the only begotten Son, Jesus. But unlike 'stepchildren,' we share with Christ full 'heirship' of the Kingdom. No 'second-class' family members HERE! We stand to gain a full inheritance, just like our brother Jesus... in Paul's words in *Ephesians*, '**Riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints**,' which is 'held in trust' for us in heaven.

That is not to say that we will have it easy as a holy type of 'trust fund baby!' As Paul said, "**we (will) suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.**" Not that we will have to suffer NEAR what our Savior, and sibling, Jesus did. But in whatever trials we DO encounter, we know that 'Big brother' will be there with us. The one who is there, standing side-by-side with us in good times and bad. Our **partner** in facing both the struggles, and the triumphs, that our earthly life brings.

As we give thanks for the one who shares in both our trials and our triumphs, we should also be mindful of how WE are there for others 'through thick and thin.' How well do others... be they close friends or perfect strangers... KNOW that you will be there 'in good times and bad.' Do others KNOW that you will be a 'partner' to them both in suffering and in glory? Be assured, JESUS knows...

And finally, the 'family tie' with the 3rd Person of the Trinity, the **Holy Spirit**, is our **POWER**. In the Great Apostle's words, "**If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.**" (*Romans 8:14*) As much as we can take comfort in the Father's PROTECTION... And the Son's PARTNERSHIP... it is by the POWER of the Holy Spirit that we can overcome the weakness of our human, everyday sinful natures. It is by the POWER of the Spirit that we are convinced of God's forgiveness of our failures... and 'put to death' those 'deeds' that so haunt us with thoughts of unworthiness..

As we considered last week, how much do we rely on the POWER of God's Spirit in our daily lives... relying instead on our own? How often do we call on the Holy Spirit to forgive ourselves... and to forgive OTHERS? Have we EVER been so BOLD to suggest to someone who cannot forgive themselves to call upon that same SPIRIT? As you and I continue to seek after the Spirit's leading, we prove ourselves to truly be "**children of God.**"

My friends, it is my hope and prayer that you *truly* believe in God the Father, who is your protector; God the Son, who is your partner; God the Holy Spirit, who is your power. May those same mysterious ‘family ties’ that bind together the 3 Persons of the Godhead also ‘hold YOU together’ – with God... and with one another. That by your relationship with the Triune God, you know yourself to be, in the words of author Tommy Newberry, a “*beautiful, wonderful child of God.*” There is a Scripture (which has been put to song) that I find most fitting here: **“Behold what manner of love the Father has given unto us, that we should be called children of God.”** (1 John 3:1) Here’s how the tune goes... Please join me... [sing with congregation]. **And all of God’s BELOVED, PRECIOUS CHILDREN said, ‘AMEN!’**

I came across the following definition of this Sunday’s purpose by another demonimation: **“Trinity Sunday has a singular purpose: to *support disciples in living out the ministries the Spirit has empowered them and the church has commissioned them to offer (as of last Sunday, Pentecost)*!”** As we continue to lay claim to the Father’s PROTECTION, the Son’s PARTNERSHIP, and the Spirit’s POWER, may we faithfully live out the ministries of God’s Church. In going for to do so, know that you do not go alone...that the Spirit of the Living God...