

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?



PASTOR CHARLIE BERTHOUD

TRINITY SUNDAY

Sunday, May 31, 2026

“What’s Your Name?” | Matthew 28:16-20 | Pastor Charlie Berthoud

In addition to “Kite Sunday” which has become sort of a high holy day around here, today is Trinity Sunday, the only day in the church year dedicated to a theological concept.

While you might have been excited about the kites, I’m guessing not too many of you woke up today and said, “Woohoo, it’s Trinity Sunday!”

But I’m hoping to convince you that there are good reasons to appreciate this day.

Easter season is when we celebrate and reflect on the resurrection of Jesus, the one who came to bring abundant life to the world. Last Sunday was Pentecost, which marks the conclusion of the Easter season and celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Trinity Sunday comes on the Sunday after Pentecost, when we celebrate that our God is one God, in three persons, traditionally named Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.



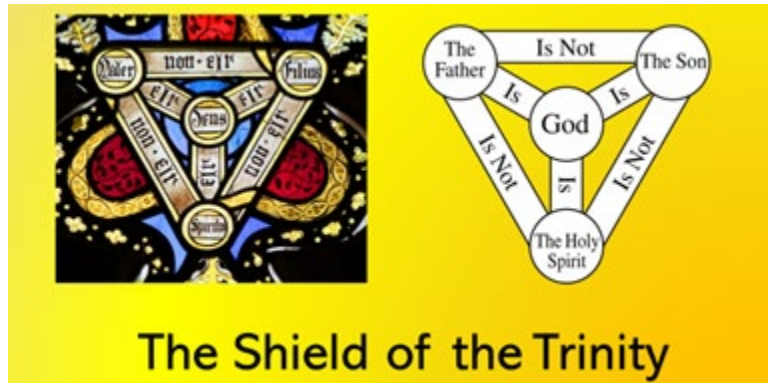
In recognition of the importance of the trinity, some churches are built with three doors, and the trinity is featured in a variety of ways in stained glass.

As for the idea itself, we believe in one God of three distinct beings. In the early years of the church there was much debate over the nature and the relationship of the three.

The Shield of the Trinity was developed around the year 1200 and put into stained glass to help people understand that each person of the trinity is distinct, but together they are one.

In case you're rusty on your Latin, there are English versions available.

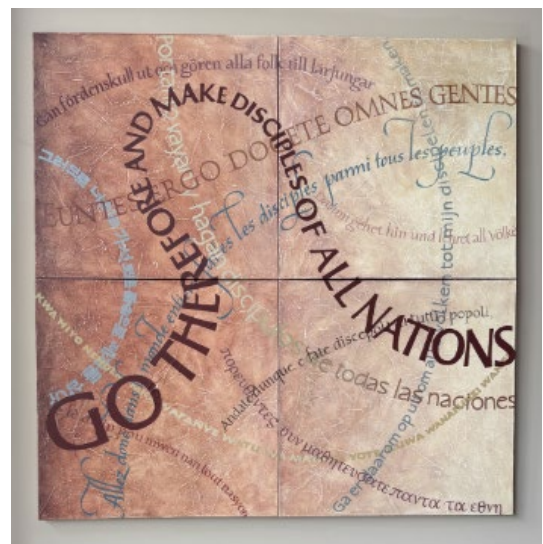
In the big picture, Trinity Sunday reminds us that the identity of God is important. The names we use for God are important. The imagery we use to describe God is important.



Our gospel reading comes from Matthew 28, one of the few places in the Bible with explicit trinitarian language.

There are several reasons why some of you may be familiar with the final words of Jesus in Matthew's gospel.

- Part of the reading is featured on the artwork just outside the sanctuary.
- These words are known as the Great Commission, and they have inspired many missionary efforts of the church—some good and some not so good.
- At baptisms, the liturgy includes the words of Jesus: “I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”
- These are the final five verses of Matthew, and it's interesting to see how the gospels each end



In January we read Matthew together as a congregation. Those of you who did so might notice several themes that are reinforced in these five verses.

- The reading begins by referencing 11 disciples, reminding us that Judas betrayed Jesus.
- The movement to Galilee reminds us that Jesus began his ministry there, on the margins, away from the religious and economic center of Jerusalem.
- The mountain setting reminds us of the temptation on a mountain, the sermon on the mount, Jesus praying on a mountain, the Mount of Olives, and more
- The authority of Jesus has been mentioned throughout, in contrast to the authority of the religious and political leaders.
- The reference to worship and doubt reminds us of the worship of the Magi and the doubt of Peter
- And Jesus' final words about being with us always, remind us of the promise at the beginning of the gospel, where we learned that this baby to be born should be called Emmanuel, which means God-with-us.

Listen for the conclusion of Matthew’s gospel on this Trinity Sunday.

“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.””

Thanks be to God for the words of scripture.

The traditional baptismal liturgy of the Presbyterian Church uses these words of Jesus, and we baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We are claiming the name of God at this sacramental moment.

And the traditional liturgy also has a curious question when we baptize a child. The pastor asks, “What is the name of this child?” It doesn’t mean the pastor has forgotten the name of the child, but instead the question is asked because traditionally people got a new name with baptism, a name with a deeper meaning.



While reflecting on names and the deeper meaning of names, I got thinking about my own name. I got thinking about some famous Charlies, wondering if we share anything in common.

According to the internet, Charlie has German and English roots, and it means both “a free person” and “a warrior.” I’m not sure that’s a

great description of me, and it’s certainly not true of every Charlie.

However, in the Bible, names had deeper significance. Moses, Peter, and Jesus himself all have names with deeper meanings.

And the name of God is a central issue through the Bible.

In Exodus 3, Moses asks God “what is your name?” wanting to get a sense of God’s identity.

God responds with “I am who I am” which is sometimes translated as “I will be who I will be.”

This enigmatic response reflects the complex and elusive nature of pinning down God.

For thousands of years, God’s people have been pondering God’s name, God’s nature, God’s identity.

So, on this Trinity Sunday, we reflect on the names and imagery used to describe our God, not just as a theological or semantic exercise, but to help us understand and know God better, and our understanding of God influences how we live. Learning and living.

Through Christian history, sometimes God has been seen as a conqueror, a mighty force that shows no mercy, a warrior—and church people have lived differently because of that understanding.

Seeing God as warrior has led many Christians to hear Jesus’ words “Go and make disciples” as a call to subjugation and domination.

This mindset led to crusades, to the conquest of the Americas, and it inspires many Christians today to look down on anyone who doesn’t practice their version of the faith.

If you see God as kind and gracious, merciful to the thousandth generation, calling us to love our neighbors, then you’ll hear the Go and make disciples call differently.

Presbyterian pastor Tom Are writes: “In the early years of my faith, I felt that my calling was to do what I could to make my neighbor Christian... I don’t believe that anymore. I am not called to make my neighbor Christian; I am called to be Christian to my neighbor.” (Presbyterian Outlook, March 28, 2005)

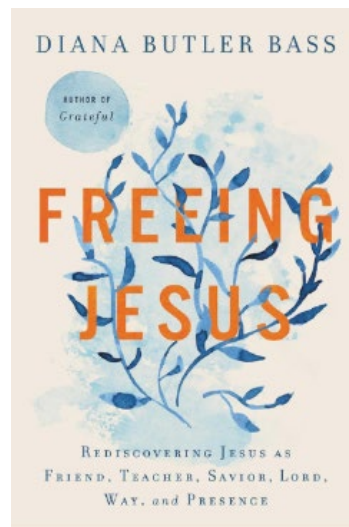
His understanding of this verse reminds me of what we heard last week, with Jesus’ call to the disciples:

You will be my witnesses. (Acts 1:6)

Trinity Sunday is a good day to consider and reconsider how we understand God, how we can be witnesses to the God we are getting to know, how we can live as new people. About five years ago, Diana Butler Bass published a wonderful reflection called *Freeing Jesus: Rediscovering Jesus as Friend, Teacher, Savior, Lord, Way, and Presence*. Her words have helped many people have a deeper and broader perspective on Jesus.

I wonder if she is going to write a book on the Holy Spirit, or on the Trinity. To help us ponder the trinity, I have three options:

- You could consider that ice, water, and steam are all different forms of the same thing.
- Or you could take inspiration from St. Augustine who realized that a tree is made up of roots, a trunk, and branches—three distinct yet inseparable parts.
- Or the language of creator, redeemer, sustainer is an option, although it’s worth noting that each person of Trinity is involved in creation, redemption, and sustenance.



My hope is that we can keep expanding our vocabulary for God, that we can continually find new ways to do think about and experience God.

In a few minutes we're going to sing a hymn that might help us expanding our God vocabulary. I mentioned the hymn in our weekly CONNECTIONS email. If you're not getting that and would like to get it, please contact the church office.

The hymn is called Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud, and it was written by Thomas Troeger. It has three verses and each verse invites us to think about one of the persons of the trinity.

The "Father" verse:

Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud,
Fortress, Fountain, Shelter, Light...

The "Son" verse:

Word and Wisdom, Root and Vine,
Shepherd, Savior, Servant, Lamb...

The Spirit verse:

Storm and Stillness, Breath and Dove,
Thunder, Tempest, Whirlwind, Fire...

As we sing it, I hope a word or two will jump out at you, as an image of God you need to ponder this week. Those of you who are familiar with lectio divina can use this holy listening to the words as we sing.

As we ponder the name of God, realizing that our words and images are all limited, it's important for us to remember that God knows us and as Isaiah reminds us, God knows our name:

But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name; you are mine.
Because you are precious in my sight and honored and I love you....
(Isaiah 43:1,4)

I'd like to close with a prayer that we can say together, with words from hymn #5 in our hymnal, "God the Sculptor of the Mountains," by John Thornburg. The hymn invites us to ponder even more images from God. Notice how each verse ends with a prayerful petition.

Let's alternate voices, going from the baptismal font side to the pulpit side.

FONT God the sculptor of the mountains, God the miller of the sand,
God the jeweler of the heavens, God the potter of the land:
you are womb of all creation; we are formless; shape us now.

PULPIT God the nuisance of the Pharaoh, God the cleaver of the sea,
God the pillar in the darkness, God the beacon of the free:
you are fount of all deliverance; we are aimless; lead us now.

FONT God the dresser of the vineyard, God the planter of the wheat,
God the reaper of the harvest, God the source of all we eat:
you are host at every table; we are hungry; feed us now.

PULPIT God the unexpected infant, God the calm, determined youth,
God the table-turning prophet, God the resurrected truth:
you are present every moment; we are searching; meet us now.

Thanks be to God, father son and spirit. Amen.

In the name of the father, son, and spirit,
the creator redeemer and sustainer,
The source, the word, and the storm
God bless you and all of us
with wisdom and courage,
with humility and compassion,
with faith hope and love now and forever, amen.