

The Three Ways
John 3:1-17
Colebrook Congregational Church
Trinity Sunday 2015

The season of Pentecost celebrates the Acts of the Holy Spirit, which has many names, and is known in many ways. One of these ways is by using the word, παρακλητος, or Paraclete. And because Divinity Students enjoy a special type of pun, when it came time to name our intramural soccer team, we called ourselves The Paracletes.

Traditionally, the second Sunday of Pentecost is Trinity Sunday, where we talk about our Triune God. In short, there is one God in three persons, each equal and eternal, and of the same substance, but still distinct.

The Romans were really confused by the Early Christians. First they thought they were a type of Judaism, then not. And then what is this talk about three gods, but they can't add a couple pagans ones like good citizens, because they insist they believe in only one God, the same one as the Jews. The Romans were lost trying to figure out what was going on with them.

Even among themselves, the Early Christians could not stop arguing about the Trinity. It got to the point that Roman Emperor Constantine, after legalizing our religion, had had enough, and effectively locked all the bishops he could find in a big room, and wouldn't let them leave until they reached a consensus. That consensus was the Nicene Creed.

How I like to describe the Trinity is three ways to experience God. Father, Son, & Holy Ghost; or Creator, Redeemer, & Sustainer.

I believe that we can experience God the Creator through Nature, God's Creation. Last evening, I drove up here for a book, and I brought my dinner with me. After retrieving the book, I sat on the porch out front, tasting a dinner with all natural ingredients, listening to the frogs, smelling the lilac bush, and seeing the beautiful sunset. I was at peace, and felt full of happiness, experiencing God the Creator with all my senses.

Jonathan Edwards wrote what is now called the Spider Letter. Addressed to a

Fellow of the Royal Society of London, it is about his experiences observing God's Creation and his conclusions based on those observations and experiences. It is called the Spider Letter because it is about a unnamed species of spider that uses its web silk material to travel. He observed that for short distances, they use their silk line, first attached to a tree branch, and then they would lower themselves out into the openness until a gust of wind makes them swing like a trapeze into the next tree. He also observed, that for longer distances, the spider would let the silk line out, unattached to anything but themselves, until the line, caught in the wind, would change its buoyancy and it carried the spider floating through the air.

Personally, I would not have walked toward the swinging trapeze spiders or the floating through the air spiders, but Edwards did, and he concluded a number of things about God based on his experience with God's Creation. Foremost among them was God that the Creator provides us all with the means with which we need to proceed though life. Also, since it looks like a fun way to travel, the Creator has not only provided all the necessities, but also for the pleasure and recreation of all Creatures, even the insects. I really like that. How many theologians would make that type of conclusion? To demonstrate that God wants us to have fun!

I believe that we can experience God the Spirit at any time. The Spirit can be present in groups gathered in Christ's name, or individually within the heart of the believer, dwelling in us, helping us to feel that the presence of God with us at any time. The Spirit can move us, and we may or may not know why, but we respond, trusting that feeling.

I know I have told this story before, but it is a good illustration of experiencing both God the Spirit and God the Christ.

In Boston for the Opening Day of AmeriCorps, I came across a box of grinders after everyone else had been through. They were unclaimed, and I knew that I did not want them. But I felt something compelling me to take as many as I could fit into my bag. My colleagues thought it was odd, but I did not care, I knew that in that moment, I had to fill my bag with them. I figured out later that I was experiencing God the Spirit, who was moving me.

She was the source of that compulsion I felt.

Then, my team then started to move across Boston. After the first subway hop, we came up from underground and as we approached a choke point, because this was during the Big Dig, I noticed a man sitting where no one could avoid him, begging for change. None of my teammates gave him anything, they couldn't give any change, our pay was so small. When I got up to him, I did what I could to get out of everyone else's way and said that I didn't have change, but I had food. I opened my bag, and asked if he wanted one. The look on his face. I saw surprise, hunger, and relief.

Jesus tells us that whenever we do something to help someone else, we also do that for Him. So in that moment with that hungry man that I fed, I experienced God the Christ.

In the Bible, God is given many names, nearly all based on adjectives, descriptors, and they all help us to better know God, through those three ways of the Trinity. We too, are known in different ways, based on adjectives and descriptors. For example, I have been known at one time or another as a soccer fullback, an eagle scout, an AmeriCorps member, a baritone, a photographer, a flautist, a dj, an Alpha Phi Omega brother, a chaplain, and other things.

Much like how we can know and experience God through the three ways of the Trinity, we are not known solely by any one of those type of things, but we are known by all of them put together. So we should ask ourselves: Who am I? How am I known? And how do I want to be known?

Prayers of the People

[PAUSE]

Almighty and everlasting God, beyond all space and time, greater than our minds can fully comprehend, we give you thanks for who you are and all that you have done for us. Loving Maker of all, we praise you for your kindness and mercy by which you sustain us and provide for our every need; you are full of goodness and compassion caring for us that we are never in want. Jesus Christ, our Savior, we thank you for coming into our lives and for showing us the magnitude of the love of God, revealing God's saving power and forgiveness, and offering us a new beginning. Holy Spirit, free and mysterious as the wind, powerful as the fire, we thank you for blowing new life into our hearts, for purifying us from our faults, for teaching and reminding us the words of Christ, and leading us in the light. Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, with awe and wonder, joy and gladness we offer you our thanks, and pray for your creation, its nations, and peoples, for your church, ourselves and all in need.

As your disciples, we pray for all who suffer, are poor, despairing, burdened, blind and battered. In your loving embrace, we pray for health and wholeness for those who are physically, mentally, or spiritually unwell. We pray for the healing of your creation, and the renewal of peace throughout the land. We pray for those who are thirsty, that they would drink from your fountain of living waters and never thirst again. We pray for all whose hands you guide, working for to serve their neighbor in any way needed.

We also pray for:

We pray these in confidence and trust, our eternal God, who is Life-Giver, Life-Saver, and Life-Renewer now and forever. To you be the glory, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, today and through all eternity. Amen.

Illustration from Jonathan Edward's Spider Letter

