

# "A Look At Our Namesake"

May 30, 2010    Trinity Sunday

**Matthew 3:13-17**

**Matthew 28:16-20**

Like many Christians, many pastors I had mixed emotions about Dan Brown's The DaVinci Code. I found it great reading, riveting and I couldn't put it down. But I found myself getting angry at the false statements that he makes about the origins of our faith. One such statement is he says that the Council of Nicea in 325 AD invented the Trinity. What is absurd about that is that the concept of the Trinity is found within the New Testament, which was written in the First Century. The Council of Nicea simply came up with a beautiful way to articulate the Trinity. Here's part of what they wrote:

*I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.*

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.*

*And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.*

Beautiful words, but nothing new from what's in the New Testament. The Creed merely describes what we find in the Bible. We'll start this morning

by looking at two passages of Scripture where we see the Trinity - God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**Matthew 3:13-17**

*Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."*

**Matthew 28:16-20**

*Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some 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."*

In 1834 a number of members of the North Parish Church in North Andover were troubled by the theology they were hearing or rather by the lack of orthodox theology they were hearing on Sunday mornings. It seemed that the majority of the congregation favored the Unitarian ways of thinking (a rejection of the Trinity, the deity of Christ and the power of the Cross and Resurrection). And so, as most of you know better than I, in 1834 a group broke off from the North Parish Church, which is still there at the Old Center of town. This group formed a church that they called, "The Evangelical Church of North Andover." By Evangelical they didn't mean what you might think of when you hear that word. It's often unfortunately associated with a particular set of social and political views. Evangelical is actually a beautiful word in our faith that means

the message of the Gospel, the Good News. This new church wanted to center itself around classic Christianity, the Good News of Christ and his love - a love that he embodied through his life, ministry, and teachings, and especially through his death and resurrection. Eventually the Evangelical Church of North Andover changed their name to "Trinitarian Congregational Church." I suspect that this name more clearly distinguished them from the wave of Unitarianism that swept up New England at the time. "We're Trinitarian," they said. "We look at God in the classic way that Christians have ever since the First Century - as Father, Son & Holy Spirit - Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer."

So, on this Trinity Sunday, let's take a look at our Namesake, The Trinity. Martin Luther once said, *"To deny the Trinity endangers your salvation; to try to comprehend the Trinity endangers your sanity."* Well, let's give it a try anyway.

You might be surprised to learn that the word "Trinity" is never used in the New Testament. However, the concept of the Trinity is certainly found there. The word of course means "Three in one." Tri-Unity. "Three in Unity."

In **Matthew 28** Jesus says *"Go forth into the world and make disciples of all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*

At Jesus' own baptism God the Father spoke words of blessing upon his Son - *"This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* And God the Holy Spirit came down upon Christ in the form of a dove to empower him for his ministry.

And in John 14 Jesus speaks of the Father sending the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Spirit to be with us and in us. **John 14:16** - *"I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever."* **John 14:25-26** - *"These things I have spoken to you while I am*

*still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." So, there is God the Son talking about God the Father sending God the Holy Spirit to be with them forever."*

Early Christians looked at these passages and many more, and said this - God the Creator is God. Christ, the Word made flesh, is God. And the Holy Spirit is God - God with us. So they came up with this concept of one God with three expressions.

St. Patrick, when he went to Ireland, compared it to the 3 extensions of a clover leaf.

A. If you look at the Creator, God the Father, passages you learn this about God. A God of holiness and justice, the Creator of all, etc. That's one extension of the clover leaf

B. If you look at the extension of the leaf of Christ, you learn these other things about God. - Grace, forgiveness, discipleship, wisdom

C. And if you look at the extension of the Spirit you learn yet even more. They're all the one God - with 3 expressions, 3 roles, 3 manifestations of the one God. Of course it's all a mystery. It's the best we can do with our finite little minds seeking to understand the Infinite One.

Theologians talk about the Trinity as God over us, God for us, and God with us. God the Creator is God over us, God greater than us - the expression of God as Almighty God, the Majestic Creator of the entire Universe. Jesus Christ is the expression of God who distinctly reveals to us how much God is for us, and how far God is willing to go to show us this love. And God the Holy Spirit is God with us and in us.

**God over us.**

**God for us.**

**God with us.**

I think those simple words get at the heart of the Trinity and who God is and how God relates to us.

There's only one other thing I'd like us to think about this morning and it's this - we need all three! We need all three members of the Trinity to have a faith and an experience with God that is complete and full.

**I. For instance, we need a God who is over us, greater than us, mightier than us.** I once saw a bumper sticker that read - *"If God were small enough to be understood, God would not be big enough to be worshipped!"*

Since I took the SAT exam my Junior Year in High School there have been 7 Presidents. Through the years I remember reading articles on them, a few of which revealed their SAT scores. There was one President who had the identical score as me, and I found this out while he was President. This made me very anxious! My score was pretty good, but not Presidential in my mind. I want a President who is smarter than me! In the same way, I want a God who is bigger, greater and smarter than me! (and fortunately we have One who is!!) People in our faith tradition have always done well in remembering the greatness of God.

**Psalm 121** - *"I lift up mine eyes to the hills; from where does my help come from? It comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth."*

**Psalm 8** - *"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens . . . . when I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have made, what are mortals that you are mindful of them, and yet you have made us a little lower than the angels."*

Do you hear what the Psalm writers are doing? They're remembering that our God is the Creator of everything that is and ever will be, the Maker of the Cosmos. To remember how big, how awesome our God is is truly humbling, comforting and inspiring all at once, isn't it? We need a God who is over us, greater than us. We need God Almighty, the Creator of all.

**II. Secondly we need a God who is not only OVER us, but we need a God who is decisively FOR us.** We need Jesus Christ who comes not to reveal the

majesty and almightiness of God, but rather he was born to reveal the tender love, compassion and grace God has for us. He came to show us how much we are loved. Brennan Manning in his great book The Ragamuffin Gospel says this: *"My deepest awareness of myself is that I am deeply loved by Jesus Christ and I have done nothing to earn it or deserve it."* - that's grace. We don't necessarily see or receive that from God the Creator, at least not as clearly. But we do see and receive that clearly from God the Son, Jesus, the Christ.

We need a God who is OVER us - God, the Creator.

We need a God who is FOR us - God, the Savior.

**III. And finally, we need a God who is WITH us and IN us.** We need God, the Holy Spirit. Otherwise God is way up there, and not down here or in here (our souls). Max Lucado tells the story of a father who had to take a job in another city. He then commuted back and forth on weekends for what seemed like a very long month. One evening he called to talk with his 3 year old and tell him goodnight. But his son refused to get on the phone and talk. "I don't want Daddy's voice," he said, "I want him!"

For many centuries all God's people got was a voice. That voice came through messengers, teachers - prophets, priests and kings. Then God's message became a Person in Jesus. He was God's Living Word to us. But he said, "It's better that I return to my Father and your Father, for the Father will send the Holy Spirit to be with you forever."

The beauty and uniqueness of Christianity is found in the Trinity. We have the very God that we need! OVER Us. FOR Us. WITH Us and IN Us. Our spiritual forefathers and foremothers stood for that. They clinged to the Trinity. And we would do well to do the same. Creator, Son and Holy Spirit. One God now and forever, Amen.