

Trinity Sunday, Year A  
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St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI  
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Today is a strange day in the life of the church. It is the only day of the entire year when the church wants to think about a doctrine. A doctrine is a set of beliefs that the church writes down and sends out to all believers. Things like sin, and atonements, and justification, and the nature of the bible. These are all doctrines; these are all rules. Today, the church would like us to spend some time thinking about the doctrine of the Trinity—the seventeen-hundred-year-old teaching that God is Three and God is One. God is Spirit and Son and Parent all mystically while being somehow One God. It's a lot to wrap your head around.

But here is the problem I have with preaching a doctrine: it's not very interesting. I didn't fall in love with church because of a doctrine, and I'm willing to bet you didn't either. I fell in love with stories, and stories continue to be the vehicle for my faith. And so, I'm going to take a doctrine and see if we can't story it up a little on this Trinity Sunday.

See if you can relate to this: years ago I was sitting in my dorm room waiting for the school year to begin, and the resident assistant starting walking up and down the hall corralling all the boys on my floor and telling us we were mandated to get up to the dining hall for some mandatory socializing. Now, nothing says fun more than mandatory socializing for a bunch of 18-year-olds. But, he said to hustle, and so we hustled—not knowing where we were going.

As we walked across the campus on a summer evening, we wondered aloud what we'd be doing—would this be maybe an ice cream social or some frisbee golf? Imagine our surprise, when we arrived to find a large space in the parking lot cleared of cars and bordered by hay bales. And, we saw a man with a microphone and a cowboy hat, so I was pretty sure that we were either going to a cattle auction or a square dance, and the square dance seemed more likely.

It turns out I was right, and for the next three hours, two hundred undergraduates got to know one another by bowing to our corners and do-si-do-ing with various levels of enthusiasm. I was rolling my eyes so hard that I'm surprised I didn't do damage to my retinas. But I have to admit, the spell of the square dance slowly worked its magic on me and on everyone else from my floor. At first we were dancing in sort of a mocking way. But by the end of the evening, I think most of us were dancing in earnest and finding that it was actually a lot of fun—though later I'm sure we wouldn't admit it. We crossed arms with strangers and friends. I imagine some people met their future partners that night. The music blasted, and once we knew the steps, we ended up dancing in squares and circles and triangles, smoothly moving from one partner to the next, laughing in spite of ourselves. It turns out that square dancing is really fun.

I want you to put a pin in square dancing for a moment. And I want to tell you about a famous icon that you may have seen. It's by a Russian iconographer named Andrei Rublev, and it's probably his most famous icon. In it, there are three winged figures sitting around a small table. They are majestic in their robes and angelic faces. The icon is titled *The Holy Trinity*. And, once you know the name of the icon, you can start to imagine that these three angels are the three

different persons of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, all sharing a simple meal.

But the reason that the icon is famous is not because it is painted so beautifully, though it is. And it's not because the subject matter is so interesting for a painting, though it is. And the icon isn't famous because the imagine is so memorable, though of course, it is.

The icon is famous because, if you look at it carefully, you start to realize that these three angels have done something really interesting. They have left some space at the table. And as you start to wonder who it is who is missing at the table, it quickly becomes clear that the person missing from the painting is the beholder—whoever is looking at the icon is the person who needs to be sitting at the table with God. The picture is incomplete without you.

Theologians have said for most of Christian history that the relationship among the Father and Son and Holy Spirit is not like a hierarchy but is instead like a dance. And I would add, because of artists like Rublev, that it is a dance that is incomplete without You. God desires to dance with you.

And perhaps you are reluctant at first. Or maybe you think it's a little corny to dance with God. Or maybe you are worried because it is your first time and you don't know the steps. I don't really care about that, and I know God doesn't either. Part of the Christian life is mandatory socializing. Every time you say a prayer, you are dancing with God. Every time you take communion, you are dancing with God. Every time you find yourself in awe of the world around you, you are dancing with God. Every time you give relief to the poor—and possibly most in those moments—you are dancing with God.

The Greek philosophical term for the dancing of God's persons is perichoresis, which you aren't going to remember. But, I have a feeling you are going to remember that time that you were invited into a square dance with the almighty creator of the universe.

So, remember that the church teaches a God who is three and who is one. Who is Creator, who is Sustainer, who is Sanctifier? Who is Mother, who is Child, who is Spirit? But, most importantly, the church teaches that God's dance is incomplete without you. Even if you don't know the steps, even if you are new at it. It doesn't matter. You are invited into the very heart of God, to dance, to feast. To love, and to serve. The Trinity needs you, or it's just words on a page. Amen.