

## The geometry of God

A sermon by the Rev. Robert B. Edson, in St. John's Episcopal Church, Franklin, Massachusetts, on Trinity Sunday, May 18, 2008.

*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...* Matthew 28:19

Today is Trinity Sunday when we remember the three most important ways we experience God. The Trinity is summed up in the two historic Apostles' and Nicene Creeds that are statements of belief in God as Father and Creator, as Son and Redeemer, and as Holy Spirit, Sanctifier. The late Cardinal Cushing of Boston liked to tell the story of when he was a young priest and was called to the scene of an accident. He asked the injured victim in his nasal South Boston twang if he believed in the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. The man looked up at him and said, "I may be dying and he's asking me riddles?"

The Trinity is better experienced than explained. It is a statement of conviction coming out of three distinct ways in which we experience God working in the world. It expresses the geometrical relationship we have with God and with each other, a triangular relationship that secures our relationship to God.

The world is in a state of continual creation and re-creation. We, as God's creatures, are in a continual state of being recreated and redeemed, all of which is accomplished through the power of God's Holy Spirit. Each of us comes to an understanding of God through our own personal experience. I can tell you what I believe, but you have to come to your own belief and understanding through your own personal experience. What distinguishes us from Unitarians is our belief in the person of Jesus Christ as God become man who brings the infinite God and finite humanity into one.

Even though we know God is above and beyond human description and gender, we ascribe our own finite human characteristics to the infinite God using such terms as the face, heart, hands, mind, voice, arms, and the breath of God. To be made in the image of God doesn't mean that God looks like us, but that we are created in the way God intends for us to be.

The Greek term for God as the creator of the universe is *Pantokrator*. God's Spirit as protector, guide and advocate is *Paraclete*. With all our attempts at explaining God, we still only have a partial understanding. As St. Paul expressed it, we are only able to see through a dark glass. We are assured that there will come a time when all will be fully revealed when we stand face to face with God.

God is known in the Hebrew Scriptures as *Elohim* describing God's creative and omnipotent nature and plurality of personality; *Jehovah* or *Yahweh* refers to God's eternal nature. *Adonai* refers to God's dominion over all. We use the masculine term Father for God's creative power, though God also has feminine characteristics that are also creative, and nurturing. The use of finite human terms is not adequate to describe the full nature of the infinite God. God is neither bound by limitations of time and space nor by our own human characteristics. God the indescribable, over us, with us, for us, in and among us is without limitation. The Trinitarian nature of God reflects our experience of knowing the one God in three distinct and important ways. Just as you know me as one person, my wife knew me as husband and father, my children know me as their father and my nephew and nieces know me as their uncle. I am still one person known in three distinctly different ways.

When we go to a restaurant, we may ask for hydrogen dioxide or H<sub>2</sub>O that will come in three forms: first as liquid in our water glass, as solid in the ice in our drink, and again as vapor or steam in our pot of tea. In the same way, the one God whom we praise and adore is seen and experienced in three distinctly different forms.

Each of us needs to ask ourselves how we relate to God. I experience God as full of majesty and power, sometimes stern and judgmental, at other times is warm, tender, nurturing and compassionate. When you formulate your knowledge of God through your own experience, you become your own theologian. In whatever we believe, we must never be casual in our attitude and commitment nor trivialize what we offer to God. If God demands perfection, why aim for anything less? If ten is perfection, why aim for seven or eight? If we never aim for perfection, we'll never our best because whatever we do in God's name must be nothing less than our very best. That we will never reach perfection must never deter us from striving for it.

So much of life is trinitarian in nature, whether in families, friendships or working relationships. God is always the third person in all human relationships. When experiencing conflict with another, God's redeeming love arches over us, giving us perspective that enables us to resolve conflicts with understanding and consideration. When we are in love, God as the third person in our relationship gives us focus and perspective. God as Creator, God as Savior and Redeemer, God as Spirit, source of power and advocate, calls us to worship, honor, and adore the oneness we share.

I sometimes hear people say that they don't understand the creed and don't say the parts they neither understand nor accept. Both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed are basic statements of belief about God as Creator of the universe. The Creator took on the form of humanity to redeem and save the creation. All this was accomplished through the action Holy Spirit who sustains and guides us. Parts of the creed are historical and factual while others are metaphorical. The creeds express something very profound and beautiful about our relationship to God who creates, redeems and sustains us.

Christ be with me, Christ within me,  
 Christ behind me, Christ before me,  
 Christ beside me, Christ to win me,  
 Christ to comfort and restore me,  
 Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
 Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
 Christ in hearts of all that love me,  
 Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

*Hymn 370 Attributed to St. Patrick*