

From Chaos to Community: A reflection on the Trinity.

The first part of a three-part sermon preached at St. Brendan Episcopal Parish, Deer Isle, Maine, on Trinity Sunday, May 31st, 2026, by the Rev. Dr. Jenny Reece, with the Rev. Andree Appel and Pastor Elaine Hewes.

Texts: Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

Prayer: Holy and Triune God, we come before you in awe of your majesty and mystery; may we who preach your word and hear it give constant praise to the one Jesus called Abba, Father, who made all this beautiful creation, and through the Spirit moving in our hearts, may we be witnesses of the Way of the new life of the Risen One; and so may our words and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, our Rock, Redeemer, Creator and Sustainer, Amen.

The last book written by Martin Luther King Jr. before his assassination was titled: *Where do we go from here? From Chaos to Community*.

I actually haven't read the book yet, I have it on order. But the title itself seems to sum up for me not only the work of God in creation as it is presented in the first chapter of Genesis, but also Jesus' commission to the first disciples.

Where do we go from here? From Chaos to Community.

From a primordial chaos came, by the will and hand of God, the whole community of created things, from light itself to the land among the waters, to the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and to the human in the garden at the center of it all, one with the whole community of creation. Although we humans have done our best to escape, exploit, or neglect that community, by the grace of God we still belong to it and by the further grace of God in Jesus, living Word, we know we are commissioned to invite all into that of which we are a part and will be forever.

That community is not something God created outside of God's self. We are made in the image of God, and the wondrous thing about the so-called doctrine of the Trinity is that it recognizes and celebrates the community of being within God's own self.

That community of being has been named and argued over in many ways. The most familiar depiction of that community in the unity of the One God is as "Father, Son and Holy Ghost," or Holy Spirit. This formula has become so familiar that other ways of depicting that truth of God's diversity within God's unity seem, at best, inadequate and, at worst, heretical. With the relatively recent turn away from the heresy of imagining that God is male, the language of Father and Son has been challenged and some people use the feminine pronoun to talk of the Spirit as She.

But God the Father is also God the Mother, and following Julian of Norwich and other mystics, God the Son is also God the Mother. If God the Spirit is talked of as She, then that leaves the masculinity of the first two elements unchallenged, or rather, emphasized. All parts of God are beyond our concepts of gender. So we try God the Parent and God the Child, but those terms seem cold, and in them perhaps Jesus is infantilized forever.

Or we choose the words Creator-Redeemer-Sustainer, and these are all wonderful words to distinguish the three persons in the Godhead. But they do not speak to the internal community of the three. The dance, as some theologians have called it, of relationship within the divine being.

So we need to keep being creative in how we think of the Trinity. One of my favorite ways was inspired by ancient writers. One of the best and least understood Patristic writers was Clement of Alexandria, back in the 2nd Century of the church. One of his wonderfully creative gifts to the early formation of Christian thought was to speak of Jesus, the Living Word of God, not only as Word and Son, but as the New Song.

Creation was the song of God, and after humanity had strayed and fallen into disharmony and silence, God came among us as Jesus as the New Song, and by the breath of the Holy Spirit we can raise our voices again in praise. Centuries later, Hildegard of Bingen, the great female mystic, musician,

herbalist, and community builder, also talked of Jesus as the Song which the choirs of angels in their myriad ranks forever sing. In turn, she and Clement have inspired me to bring you today this thought of the Trinity as God the Singer, God the Song, and God the Holy Breath on which all sound is borne. Having just sung an amazing concert with the Bagaduce Chorale, this understanding of the Trinity is very dear to me. I know experientially how the Singer is distinct from the Song, but needs to express it; how the Song is distinct from the Singer, but dependent on it; how they both are distinct from the Holy Breath but need it to communicate. Singer, Song, Breath: all three are inseparable but each is unique, with its own role. And the Singer the Song and the Breath invite us into the music, into the dance of their eternal relationship, calling us always, and all our world out of Chaos, into Community. That's where we are going. In the name of the Triune God, the Singer, the Song, and the Holy Breath, Amen.

CS Lewis says, in *Mere Christianity*, that “there are a great many things that cannot be understood until after you have gone a certain distance along the Christian road”.

That is certainly true for me in the case of the Holy Trinity. For many years, I was content to give it lip service (especially in the weekly recitation of the Nicene Creed) because just trying to figure out my relationship to God- and Jesus- was plenty for me!

But further down that road now, as I meditate on the words of Scripture and our liturgy, it has become more important to me- and also easier- to relate to the Three Persons of the Trinity in a more holistic and satisfying way that informs (and conforms with) my understanding of the loving and respectful relationship that God wants us to have with God and with each other.

One problem that I had for a long time was the use of the word “persons” to describe the Trinity....persons are people! Only recently have I come to better understand this usage as being truly descriptive of members of a Triune God who are distinct and differentiated yet in perfect unity with one another. A true unity in diversity.

God the Creator, Christ our Redeemer and the Holy Spirit, our Sustainer. These three persons, acting in, among and through us- God eternally interacting with the world in communion with the other persons of the Trinity to reveal God’s self to us and to guide us into Truth and love. I relate to all three as God’s presence in my life.

The persons of the Trinity are a relational model for us where distinctions are acknowledged and celebrated but where no one is first or last. Together, as one body, we exist only to uphold and promote the glory of God brought to fruition in relationships of mutuality, bound by and powered by God’s eternal love.

It has helped me to remember that the Nicene Creed (which articulates the doctrine of the Trinity) was not just as an academic or philosophical exercise but also sought to reflect the many ways in which the earliest Christians encountered God.

It’s a wonder to me that they were able to come to any kind of agreement given the manifold ways in which God is experienced- then and now. How they must have struggled. But then I am also reminded that long before the Church fathers met in Nicaea, Jesus had already given the disciples instructions- to baptize people in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...

So that's kind of it in a nutshell. The doctrine of the Trinity is the church's attempt to help us understand how God is with us- in the past, present and future. God eternally at work in the universe, promoting the dream of God, in communion with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. And who invites us, through baptism and through the Eucharist, to join in that communion and in the life of God.

Imagine that!!! There is a place for us at the table!

That's where I am today....fully cognizant of the mystery of the workings of God and of how limited my comprehension of the mind of God is. In fact, the further I go on my faith journey, the more mystery seems to be in everything.

I am going to close with a poem about mystery, a poem called *Mysteries, Yes* by Mary Oliver, [Mysteries, Yes by Mary Oliver • Read A Little Poetry](#)

Amen.

One Image of the Trinity

Elaine Hewes

I'm just going to tell a story I've shared with you before about something I witnessed in the Philadelphia Airport years ago... Because I can't think of anything that speaks more clearly to my understanding of the Trinity... An understanding very much in sync with the icon on the front of our bulletin for this morning painted in 1425 by Andre Rublev; an icon which theologian Henry Nouwen has titled "Living in the House of Love..."

So anyway, on this one particular day, Michael and I had about four hours to kill in the Philadelphia airport on one of our many trips between Maine and Chicago... and so we decided to sit for a time in one of those large food courts filled with square white tables and orange chairs surrounded by take-out choices like Sbarro Pizza, Chipolti's Burritos, The Philly Pretzel Factory, Le Bus, and "Smashburger."

We each chose what we wanted for lunch and sat down to eat, when I saw just a few tables from us, three men (two young and one old), **sitting very much like the figures in Rublev's icon**, complete with the white table and orange chairs and a space open on one side for someone else to join them... as if to say, "There's room for you too."

In this case, it took a little stretch of the imagination to see Rublev's icon of the Trinity in the scene with the three men in the food court, because of course they were well outfitted with the

accoutrements of 21st century life, like computers, cell phones, carry-ons, and guitars. There was a wheel chair off to one side, not far from the old man. And, naturally, the men were not dressed in what looks like fancy bathrobes, as the three men in Rublev's icon are....

But I began to recognize the "thing" that lives at the heart of the Trinity when one of the young guys said to the other, "Come on, let's play," both of them taking their guitars out of their cases, tuning them up, and then beginning to play, starting with the jazzy jewel of a song, "Ain't Misbehavin"....

And when I say "play," I mean the kind of playing where one begins with the melody, and the other leans in a little, and begins with a few accompanying chords, and then takes off with jazzy little notes up and down the neck of the guitar, and then the first guy is leaning in too, listening for who-knows-what, but something that sends him into an improvisational flurry all over his guitar strings, and then there are bridges into variations on the "Ain't Misbehavin" theme that lead into licks that start going in whole new directions, both of the guys totally focused on the music and each other, and everybody sitting at the tables around them, turning toward the music and these guys, their entire bodies leaning into each other, and the old man at the table, who is blind (and who we find out later is the accordion playing part of their trio), listening to the music like he's taking it in through the pores of his skin, and then the two guys starting to play "Blue Skies," leading to bluesy jazzy impossibly difficult modulations and variations on the theme, and people coming closer and leaning in and sitting down and listening, and the airport "musac" fading into the background, and the woman's voice

that wants to tell us to report any suspicious behavior to the nearest airport security person fading into the background, and the women making pretzels at the Philly Pretzel Factory looking up to see what it is they are hearing, and then the guitar guys modulating into “Zippidy Do Dah,” and me considering asking Michael if we couldn’t move some tables and dance, imagining the entire food court transformed into a dance floor, and everyone dancing, and what a startling little gift that would be for everyone who came to the food court that afternoon thinking it was just another day.... (but I’m a shy Lutheran and a bad dancer, and so think better of the idea).

And then me focusing again on the three men at the table and kind of wondering if their faces aren’t shining like Moses’ when he came down the mountain that day, and realizing that everyone in our section of the food court is caught up in the thing that the guitar guys are caught up in, and I can’t tell if it’s the music or the fire or the passion or **the unexpected sound of something so far beyond competence it has become Presence... So far beyond mastery it has become mystery....**

And I look at all of us in that section of the food court, and I think, “This is what church is supposed to feel like... and I whip out my journal and I write, “Is this what Jesus had in mind when he prayed, ‘Father, may they be one as we are one?’ And I look at the little Trinity of two young guys and an old guy and I think to myself, “so here it is, although I’m still not sure how to describe what “it” is except to say that it’s fiery and beautiful and utterly devastating **if what you’re looking for is a regular old day...** And it’s happening in the relationship between the three guys at the table, and then widening out into the food court, inviting us all to take our seats at

the open space at the table, where we are all going in our imaginations... into that space, that music, that moment, that presence...

And while I'm still not sure if the relationship between the three guys was the thing, or if the music was the thing, or if the moment in the food court with everyone leaning in was the thing, what I know is that for a brief moment we were all a-tuned to the same thing, for which I have no name, but for which I give profound thanks...

The thing that I have come to see lives at the heart of the Trinity... The thing that has moved over the chaos and darkness from the beginning.... The thing Jesus incarnated in such a way that Rome could not stand it... the thing that moves around and under and through us right now... the thing we are called as a church, as a community of faith, to tune our lives to, and then to bear witness to....

The thing for which there seems to be no adequate word except "love"... The Presence that opens us with such excruciating beauty we gasp, and look up, and suddenly know ourselves and all of the food court, all of the airport, all of Philadelphia and the United States and the world.... All of creation held in mercy and grace, including the guy with the big diamond ring on his pinky finger and his blonde babe sitting in the food court at the table right next to you...

And I remember once again that the Trinity isn't just a **doctrine**... It's an **invitation** to see in the relationship of "the three," the relationship between you and me and everything in the world

God so loves... It's an invitation to choose the blessed "we" over the miserly little "me"... Or, as 14th century mystic Meister Eckhart once put it, it's an invitation to see that "between us and God there is no between..." The presence and essence of God moving in and around and within us, as close to us as the air we breathe, uniting us into one body we Christians call the body of Christ...