

What's Up, Doctrine?

[Text -Matthew 28:16-20]

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The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity was an attempt by early Christians to explain the mystery of the intricate and intimate relationship between the God who creates life, the Christ who redeems our living, and the Holy Spirit who continues to inspire our lives each day. This doctrine's intent is to celebrate a Divine loving relationship and continual collaboration; yet it's often been used to divide people of faith and to hinder the Divine desire for unity. So this morning, heretic that I am, I'd like us to ignore the ancient doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and focus on the multiple of relationships that the Trinity seeks to reveal and nurture. To me, the Holy Trinity isn't a set theological construct to be explained or defended; it's a marvelous and mysterious relationship to be explored, experienced, and celebrated! It's a multi-layered relationship within the Divine Nature that speaks profoundly about how the Holy One relates to you and me; and about how you and I can relate to one another.

Two-thousand years ago when Jesus talked about God, he shocked and angered many of the religious people around him. Rather than talking about an unapproachable, demanding Deity, Jesus uses language and images that reveal One who is caring, loving, and intimate. By addressing God as "ABBA" [or "Papa"], Jesus evokes the image of a personal, compassionate parent, whose primary concern is for the well-being of His or *Her* children. For even though Jesus uses the masculine term "Father," he also understands the Divine Bearer of Life in a feminine context. Jesus says, "What *woman* among you, having ten precious coins, if losing one, will not diligently search the entire house until she finds it. And when she finds it, she calls her friends together to

joyfully celebrate!” This is how the Holy One seeks those who are lost, and rejoices - in community - when they are found.

Jesus understands that *all* people - male *and* female, straight and gay, lesbian and transgender - *all* of us are created in the Divine Image. And everything in this entire creation, even a falling sparrow, is known, valued and loved by the Holy One who called this Creation into being. In the Holy Trinity, we contemplate and celebrate the Holy One as *Creator* - the Divine Source of Life who not only starts the process, but Who continues to sustain and care for the entire human family, and the complete cosmos, at every moment in time.

At one particular moment in time, Jesus the Christ - the Anointed One - comes to embody that Divine compassion and grace. Jesus lives his life as a True Child of God. And he sees in every other child of God, and in every situation, the opportunity to elicit that which is good and loving and holy. He welcomes *all* to the table to break bread - to share in Life’s celebration - because for Jesus, there are no “outsiders” to the Divine Realm. In fact, he makes it his top priority to welcome those who society and religion often consider outcasts - to intentionally include those who would otherwise be pushed aside.

Unfortunately, the religious establishment in Jesus’ day, not unlike many established religions today, fear this open and welcoming Spirit which Jesus embodies. They have their own holy doctrines and righteous rules to determine who belongs, and who doesn’t - who is worthy, and who is not. Yet Jesus keeps breaking those rules:

He violates the Sabbath rest, by working to heal those who are hurting - regardless of the day of the week.

He touches the “untouchable” lepers, and embraces the publically scorned sinners, tax-collectors, and prostitutes.

He defies the doctrine of treating foreigners and nonbelievers as enemies to be distrusted, boldly declaring “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” And Jesus goes on to demonstrate that our “neighbor” is *anyone* we meet: Male or Female - Religious or Secular - Mainstream or Minority - the injured victim of a robbery, or the “Good” Samaritan who stops to help.

In every facet of his life, Jesus finds a way to do the loving thing - because that is Jesus’ nature - his *Divine* Nature. And even when his insistence that all be welcomed and included, leads to his own exclusion, condemnation, and death, Jesus continues to trust that the Divine Spirit of Life and Love will prevail. The essential message of Easter, is that when the worst possible thing happens, the Divine Power of Life and Love will still ultimately triumph. And when the time comes for Jesus to relinquish his earthly form, the Divine Essence of his Life and Love does not die, but disperses and grows and multiplies in and through those people who faithfully follow his example.

The Infinite Spirit of Life and Wisdom [*Sophia* in the Greek] - Who was there from the beginning; Who lived and loved in and through Jesus Christ - continues to live and thrive in our world today - calling you and me to also live and thrive as beloved children of God. This Holy Spirit *inspires* - breathes into us - the power to be compassionate, Christ-like people. And by the presence of that Holy Spirit within us and around us, you and I are energized to carry-forward Christ’s ministry: To feed the hungry, heal the sick, liberate the oppressed, and joyfully proclaim the Good News of God’s gracious welcome to all people.

The Divine Spirit who lovingly brings this Creation to Life, who personifies that love and life in the person of Jesus, is the same Holy Spirit who has acted throughout history, and who fills you and me with new life and purpose today. So, is that 1 or 2 or 3, or 4 or many *more* Divine Manifestations? It kind of depends on how

you want to count them. To me, what really counts is that the Holy One calls us all into multiple Holy and wholesome relationships; and that today, this happy heretic can practice his faith in and among this loving and inclusive Family of Faith. It's certainly more rewarding than doing a doctoral dissertation diligently defending a dry, dogmatic doctrine detailing the definitive decline of Divine dualism! Far more rewarding, and a lot more fun!