

The Rev. Marguerite Alley
May 18, 2008
Trinity Sunday

Does anyone else here see the humor in me having the responsibility for correcting John's heresy from last week? Apart from the obvious bit about me having any responsibility, I hardly think that I would be anyone's choice for correcting anything. I mean, I am the one who thought until just a couple of years ago that mouse traps worked just like the did in cartoons and caught mice by the tail.

Yes, sniffing out heresy is just not my cup of tea! So, if that is what you were hoping for this morning, you may be disappointed. In fact, I'd like to say, as regards heresy, that I don't think heresy really exists in an educated society. Now, I might just be saying that to comfort myself because of what I may or may not say as this sermon progresses. But the concept of heresy has been the churches' way of keeping folks like you and me in the dark for a long time. Now that we can Google stuff, now that we can pretty much mouth off on any subject they want, regardless of our level of knowledge, people don't really get called heretics and burned at the stake anymore. Lucky for John, huh?

On a more serious note, I am certain that some of you went home last week and studied up on your Trinitarian theology. You know, they have 12 step groups for that too...."Hi, My name is Marguerite and I am a Trinitarian". I am right aren't I? You came this week expecting a scintillating discussion of monarchianism, modalism and sabellianism. Sorry to disappoint you, but you are not going to get that either. Lest you think though, that I am one of folks who just mouth off without knowing what they are talking about, let me give you a bit of history before I give you my only slightly heretical viewpoint.

One of the most hotly debated theological issues in the early Christian church was the doctrine of the Trinity. How do God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit relate to one another? How can there only be one God, but three Persons? All of the various early heresies resulted from individuals overemphasizing or underemphasizing various aspects of the Godhead. Ultimately, all of these false views result from attempts by finite minded human beings to fully understand and infinite God (Romans 11:33-36).

Monarchianism had two primary forms, Dynamic Monarchianism and Modalistic Monarchianism. Dynamic Monarchianism is the view that Jesus was not in His nature God. It is the view that God existed in Jesus, just as God exists in all of us – but that God existed in Jesus in a particularly powerful way. Jesus was God because God inhabited Him. Modalistic Monarchianism, also known as Modalism, is the view that God variously manifested Himself as the Father (primarily in the Old Testament), other times as the Son (primarily from Jesus' conception to His ascension), and other times as the Holy Spirit (primarily after Jesus' ascension into Heaven). God is not three Persons. Rather, Modalistic Monarchianism / Modalism teaches the God has simply revealed Himself in three different modes. Modalistic Monarchianism / Modalism is also known as Sabellianism, named after Sabellius, and influential early proponent of the view. Yet another aspect of Modalistic Monarchianism / Modalism / Sabellianism is Patripassianism, which is the view that it was God the Father who became incarnate, suffered, died, and was resurrected. Patripassianism essentially teaches that God the Father became His own Son. Ok...that's just weird!

With all that said, Sabellianism, Modalism, Monarchianism (dynamic and modalistic), and Patripassianism are all non-biblical. The concept of the trinity, and even the word trinity do not exist in the Bible. We made it up!!!! The fact is the best answer anyone has to the confusion about the Trinity is this: "Don't try to understand it! It's too much for our little and limited brains." And there you have it. The scholars say we can never understand an infinite God because we are finite. So there. Why bother.

Now.....onto more important questions. There is really one important question that we must answer before we leave today, so I will kindly ask the ushers to lock the doors, because we are NOT getting out of here until we have this all sorted out. If I can't be responsible for sniffing out heresy, I will at least be dictatorial about it. With all this discussion of heresy and monarchianism (not to be confused with maniacalism) and modalism and so forth, I at least and I hope you are too, am left with one burning question.

One question that if answered will help us sort out a myriad of other burning issues. One question that will illumine and enlighten to such a degree that our greatest issues of faith will fall away and we will be free. One question that,....well you get the idea. It's an important one.....so pay attention.

WHO CARES?

Seriously, that is the question. Who cares? Does knowing how God can be Father, Son and Holy Spirit actually make any difference any where in the universe? Will it change how we view history? Will it change what happens now, during our lives? Will it change the future?

Would understanding the 3-in-1 nature of God mean that hunger would disappear? Would it mean end the war in Iraq? Would it stop the genocide in Darfur? Would it provide housing for thousands of people still living in tents under the bridge 2 years after the hurricane in New Orleans or the hundreds of thousands living in tents this minute in China? Would it help us minister to the victims of the cyclone in Myanmar? Would it help us to say the right thing to comfort someone in Suffolk?

Would understanding the complex interplay of the traits of each of the three entities of the Trinity have saved your marriage? Would it have kept your kid from trying drugs? Would it have kept you from a bad investment? Would it have made you decide to go to college, or to not get married, or to have spent more time with your kids when they were young?

Do you know that there were wars fought over this stuff????

Ok.....so don't get me going on that subject.....

So here is the real point. Today is Trinity Sunday. Who cares? No one. Now that is probably heretical.....but who cares? I've been off the Bishop's "Bad Deacon" list for month or so.....if I get back on now, no one will have even missed me!

Does today mean anything really as far as your faith is concerned? I don't think so. If you have trouble with the whole 3-n-1 bit, then I don't know...just pick one and go with that! Need that father figure? Go with that. Need a hip brother figure in your life? Go with Jesus. Need that touchy feely, ooey-goey, spirit thing working for ya? Go find it! I don't care! **But remember, you don't get to pick one for me! I get to go with whoever I want.**

So, let's say for the sake of argument that we aren't still wrestling with the mechanics of how GOD can do whatever he/she/we/they wants. Let's say, just for the sake of argument that this is not something we fight wars over anymore. It still is a cleverly disguised way of getting us off the subject and keeping us from asking the really important question that follows "Who cares". The really important question that really does matter, that really will make a difference in your life, in your family and in your future. And that is...well that is actually another whole sermon so we'll save that for another day. Thanks for listening.