

Holy Trinity is one of those Sundays that cause preachers to either crack a lot of jokes or give themselves major headaches. That's the trouble with a day dedicated to the Holy Trinity. The saying is that if you talk about the Trinity, eventually you'll enter into heresy. There's a meme going around that says, "How not to commit heresy preaching on the Trinity: say nothing and show pictures of kittens instead." I also thought about just coming up here and saying two words—"Holy Mystery"—and sitting down. ...maybe I'll be brave enough to try that when it's not my second Sunday in a call!

The trouble is, the Trinity is not something any of us can explain...but, geez, is it tempting to try! Even preachers who know better end up wading into a pool of metaphors and unhelpful allegories. We use language that feels innovative like "Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer" instead of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We talk about things being "three-in-one," like how water can be ice, liquid, or steam, but it's always still water. But even still, these things don't do enough. They relegate our God into modalism, the idea that the persons of the God-head are simply functional and not actually innate qualities of who our God is.

Our scripture readings don't really tend to help us out, either. They are selected because they, in different ways, refer to God in the persons of the Trinity, but they don't go much further than that.

Ultimately, it isn't important for us to explain how the Trinity works or what the Trinity is. We won't ever be able to, and it doesn't affect the meaning of the Trinity for us. Instead of explanations, it is enough simply for us to know that the Trinity *is*. The Trinity reveals a fuller image of God, but it does not reveal the *full* image of God. If we only had one person of the Trinity, we would be missing part of the story of God.

That's why I want to do something a little different for my sermon this morning. I just want to share three stories. To my mind, they each highlight or illustrate a person of the Trinity. You might hear them differently. But just as one person of the Trinity does not showcase all of God's work, these stories work together to give us a slightly fuller picture of the ways in which God works.

The first story is about a camp. Outdoor ministry has always been a big part of my life. I started as a camper and then was on staff for close to ten years, off-and-on, through college and seminary. My church camp home is Lutheran Retreats, Camps, and Conferences of Southern California. LRCC has two sites: El Camino Pines, North of LA, and Luther Glen, tucked away in Apple Country on your way out to the desert.

Several years ago, it became clear that Luther Glen needed to make a shift—it's mission needed to change. And so staff and board of directors had a pretty incredible idea: let's make a farm! It was something none of them had hands-on experience with, but there was a sense that giving kids and families a place to go to connect to their food and how it was grown would be a great thing.

I should mention that most of the campers who come to LRCC's camps come from cities and suburbs, where they are unlikely to encounter produce that doesn't come from the supermarket, unless their family happens to have a backyard garden.

It was a lot of work—and is still ongoing! But it is incredible to see how Luther Glen is embracing the creation around them and encouraging new growth and life. There are raised beds that produce most of the vegetables used on site. They have chickens and goats and sheep. The cabins all have showers, so they turned the defunct old shower house into in a worm house for composting. A couple years ago, they actually even had a barn raising and now have a beautiful barn to house their livestock.

It was a risk, moving from simply being a place of sanctuary in the forest to being a working farm, in addition to a retreat center and camp, but it has proven worth it. At Luther Glen, God's abundance is on display every day and people eat the bounty collected from the garden. God's incredible creation is highlighted in a new and valuable way.

And then there's a story shared by Pastor Tina, a colleague and seminary classmate who serves a congregation outside of Cleveland. She was taking communion to one of her members. This woman is ninety-years old and lives in an assisted living facility. They had a great visit and Pastor Tina had brought communion to her. When they had finished their time together, this woman offered to walk Pastor Tina out of the facility.

Apparently, it was a slow process, as this woman was limited in her mobility. As they moved down the hallway, this woman kept inviting her neighbors out to meet Pastor Tina. She would make introductions and then ask these unsuspecting neighbors if they wanted communion. When they said yes, this woman looked at Pastor Tina and said, "Get to it, Pastor."

What followed was something incredible. Pastor Tina describes it as a fishes and loaves moment. There were so many people who wished to be communed that Pastor Tina ran out of wine in her communion kit and they ended up using some Arbor Mist someone had leftover somewhere. Pastor Tina expressed how thankful she is "for this senior's desire to spread the means of grace." She wanted to spread the means of

grace, and she also wanted to share Christ. That “fishes and loaves” was a moment when our God, the *body and blood* of Christ was passed, was shared, was offered, was received in an unassuming hallway.

Finally, I heard another story from a Lutheran congregation. Recently, a family from Romania had ended up in the area. They came into this country fleeing danger in their own, but they entered without a legal immigration status. They were caught, but while their case to be given refugee status is pending, they are allowed to stay in the country, as long as they wear trackable ankle bracelets.

Somehow, this family made its way to this congregation and connected with the pastor. There was a huge language barrier: the family speaks almost no English and no one at the church speaks Romanian. Regardless, a relationship was beginning to blossom and the congregation was searching for resources that might be able to help this family.

One Sunday, it happened to be Pentecost, a woman came to this congregation to worship for the first time. She said that she didn’t know why she was there, she just felt compelled to go to church and compelled to go to *this* church. She had no earthly reason to go there, other than this feeling she couldn’t ignore.

During the sermon, the pastor mentioned this Romanian family and their needs and the resources they were trying to find. All of a sudden this woman knew why she had felt compelled to be at *this* church on *this* day. See, this woman spent the early years of her life in Romania. She had moved to the states with her parents when she was a child, but there were things she remembered. She still had connections to her cultural heritage and spoke fluent Romanian. After the service, she sought this family out and began a rapid fire conversation with them, informing them of where they could connect with other Romanian people and helping to translate between the pastor and the family.

It was incredible. It was a Pentecost moment and it just so happened to occur on Pentecost Sunday. It was the Holy Spirit, moving hearts and bodies and minds and mouths to connect people with God’s love.

Three stories. An incomplete vision of our Three-in-one God.

Holy Trinity. Holy Mystery.

Amen.