

Last Sunday, we covered many things.

It was Pentecost Sunday

and that's a big deal in the life of the church.

It is a celebratory milestone

that marks the pouring out of the Holy Spirit

onto the people after Christ's ascension

and marks (what we traditionally have called)  
the birth of the church.

And last week it was Whit's final Sunday.

He gave us a good, goodbye

and we sang and lived into unity,

with the choir and Kairos band.

We celebrated communion

which is **the** act in the church

that binds us with all the faithful

throughout time and space.

Many things were covered.

Last week was a big week.

Trinity Sunday follows Pentecost

and marks the end

of the Eastertide season in the church.

Pentecost often gets the bigger spotlight,

after all it is the holy day

where we are given just a glimpse

of the many things

that the Spirit of God

is able to accomplish

through the power of the risen Christ.

Trinity Sunday, the celebration

of the mystery and faith

of the Holy Trinity,

involves many things.

To talk about God as triune is to talk about  
**is the** unique marker of our Christian faith  
—this doctrine of the Holy Trinity  
speaks of God in whom  
there are three persons  
who share one substance;  
and that God has a name  
that denotes these three persons  
as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,<sup>1</sup>  
well, to talk about this doctrine  
is to talk about the bedrock  
of our distinct revelation of God  
among the plurality of other religious traditions.

Hoping to help explain our unique distinction,  
this most important doctrine of our faith,  
meant that for years  
I would buy a tube of toothpaste  
to teach our Quest confirmation class  
about the Trinity.

This toothpaste isn't always easy to find,  
BUT! Aquafresh was my favorite visual  
to use for talking about the Trinity.

On Facebook group, PCUSA leaders,  
a pastor in Anchorage Alaska said,  
“let's share some terrible visual aids  
for Trinity Sunday.”

Here are some that were posted.



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<sup>1</sup> Philip Turner, Feasting on the Word: Year C, Vol. 3 (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2010) John 16:12-15, pg. 44



I guess I should add my Aqua-fresh to the mix.



My colleagues would deem

this a bad visual aid for this Sunday.

My apologies to the years of confirmation youth

I have corrupted with my bad theology.

However, in my defense

I challenged them

(And what 8<sup>th</sup> grader do you know

who doesn't like a Sunday morning challenge)?

I challenged them to separate out,

the white from the red and the green in the toothpaste...

*with toothpicks.*

So let me just tell you,

it is impossible to separate out

the white cavity fighting toothpaste

from the red plaque removing

from the green cleaning minty fresh toothpaste.

It cannot be done.

Which is actually why

for all those years

I used it as a visual

to talk about this unique relationship

of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

We talk as about God as three,

regularly in our life of faith together.

We use the trinitarian formula for baptism

like Jesus said for us to,

but we also talk about God as one.  
God is also three.  
But God is also one.  
At the same time.  
Many things.

The point to our confirmation youth  
was no matter how hard you try,  
you cannot separate God the Father and Creator  
from the God the Son and Redeemer  
from God the Spirit and Sustainer.  
This unique relationship  
is the center of our faith.

It was Tertullian in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century  
who coined this word, *Trinity*  
from the Latin word *trinitas*  
meaning triad or three-fold.<sup>2</sup>  
It took close to 300 years  
after that Pentecost moment in Jerusalem  
for the church to officially adopt and use  
this understanding of God as Trinity.  
That's a lot of debating and papal writing;  
the word *trinity* never appears in the Bible;  
many things were to be considered in those 300 years.

And there are many things that could be said  
about the doctrine of the Holy Trinity,  
but like Jesus who tells his disciples,  
"I still have many things to say to you,  
but you cannot bear them now,"  
we hear a great teacher understanding  
that his disciples can only take in so much.<sup>3</sup>  
Much like a good preacher  
who realizes she could say many things,  
but knows it is best to focus on one,

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Rohr with Mike Morrell, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* (Whitaker House, New Kensington, PA 2016) pg. 48

<sup>3</sup> Bruce E. Shields, *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Vol. 3* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2010) John 16:12-15, pg. 45

so that we all can bear it.

And so, we can also make it to lunch [early].

So perhaps **the** one thing that stands out  
for our right here, right now,  
the one thing to focus on,  
is the Spirit of truth.

In John's gospel,

Jesus reiterates how this  
unique, divine, and holy relationship works.  
Everything that is the Father's is also Jesus's.  
And because it is Jesus's,  
the Spirit will make sure it becomes ours,  
"all that the Father has is mine.  
For this reason  
he will take what is mine  
and declare it to you."

So, what is the Spirit declaring?

What is it that is the Father's  
and also the Son's  
and now the Spirit's to declare?

Christ says that the Spirit of truth  
will come to guide you  
in all the truth.

Which sounds simple enough  
but like many things in our life of faith together  
this Spirit of truth  
is not simple.

For one, John is not promising

that because of the Spirit's presence  
we will have some wonderful mystical union with Jesus<sup>4</sup>  
—that kind of thinking  
shows us what an individualized culture  
we live in.

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<sup>4</sup> Eugene C. Bay, *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Vol. 3* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2010) John 16:12-15, pg. 44

This promise of the truth is for the whole community—  
the Spirit of truth will come  
and guide all of us in all the truth.

And of course,  
the Spirit of truth and truth  
here aren't quite what we think of as truth.  
Truth isn't facts and information.

Our churches and faith communities  
are not to be places where truth means  
**the facts** can all be known.

The Spirit of truth isn't some high and lofty  
divine wisdom either.

Our churches are not communities  
to be built around an assurance of  
**the certainty of truth** over against  
all other truths.

For John, the truth *is Jesus*.

John 14:6 is where Jesus tells his community  
*I am the way, the truth, the life.*

So, the truth, into which our community  
is to be guided  
has to do with Jesus himself.<sup>5</sup>

Just like bad visuals of the Holy Trinity,  
what we must be careful with  
is our tendency to absolutize our messaging  
of the truth to the world.

New Testament scholar Bruce Shields explains,  
“Truth never just appears  
or just lies there.

Truth is always communicated somehow,  
and *the how* too often  
negates *the what* of the truth.<sup>6</sup>

Think about that for a moment.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid pg. 44

<sup>6</sup> Bruce E. Shields, *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Vol. 3* (Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2010) John 16:12-15, pg. 49

*The how* often negates the what  
—*how*, we reveal Jesus  
often negates the very revelation  
of Jesus himself.

Dang.

Don't we know that to be true?  
Gandhi was right when he quipped,  
"I like your Christ,  
but I do not like your Christians."

Which means what John wants most  
is for faithful communities  
to embrace the distinct  
but whole toothpaste.  
John is encouraging the community  
with openness  
to receive and discern  
fresh encounters with the revelation of Jesus.<sup>7</sup>  
That is what the Spirit of truth  
is guiding us toward.

This, I believe, is why Christ says,  
"I still have *many things* to tell you,  
that you cannot yet bear to hear."

Church this is a promise,  
post Pentecost,  
to expect and adapt  
with open hearts and minds,  
to anticipate fresh encounters  
with the revelation of Jesus.

"John imagines a Christian community  
that is not locked in the past  
but understands  
what Jesus means for its own time.

He anticipates that changing circumstances  
and the emergence of new questions  
...will require the community to think afresh."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pg.46

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pg. 46

This is our task.

Our task is not to separate out the Trinity.

We don't even have to explain it  
or understand it fully.

We are just a people  
who are told to faithfully be guided  
into truth  
by the Spirit of truth.

Remember last week

when I said that the UCC

used to have that motto of the coma,

and the tag line was God is still speaking

...well John tells us,

“Jesus has more to say [us]

...[we] need to know that we are all involved  
in the search for the truth.”<sup>9</sup>

“I still have many things to say to you...”

May it be so. Amen.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. pg. 49