



Rev Nancy M Raabe

Grace Lutheran Church
Hatfield PA

Grace Lutheran Church
June 12, 2022: The Holy Trinity
“Come Join the Dance” ([John 16:12-15](#))

Need versus want. What do we want, versus what do we need? And how do we distinguish between the two?

Back in her teens, this used to be a murky area for our daughter Margaret. On our regular trips to CVS it seemed like her basket of “necessities” always rang up at around the same high price. I would jokingly ask, “Are these things you need, or just things that you want?” “Mom,” she’d reply looking at me as if I was clueless, “I NEED them!”

Every year on the Sunday after Pentecost our liturgical calendar calls us to re-examine the doctrine of the Holy Trinity—one God, three persons. We have already established that it’s a matter the human intellect cannot resolve. Do we *need* to understand it, or do we just *want* to because we’re used to having all the answers?

In a few minutes we’ll hear the Athanasian Creed, the early church’s heartfelt and, I have to say, rather humorous attempt to explain the Trinity as three persons who are distinct yet indivisible. Putting up its armor against heresy, the Athanasian Creed dares to threaten those who do not grasp it. But even this elaborate explanation comes up short. In the end all we can say is, “The Trinity is a *mystery* which cannot be comprehended by human reason but is understood only through faith.”

If not the “how” and the “why,” what DO we need to know, then, when it comes to the Holy Trinity?

Just this: That one God in three persons is a matchless gift from God’s heart of love. Our God, the Christian God, is not a remote deity that looks down on us from a distant place. Instead we have a dance going on among these three persons, a dynamic and magnificent interconnectedness of the essence of who God is, our God who provides for life in all its miraculous forms. We have the Father, the architect of the cosmos. We have the Son who was with God at the beginning, as we heard in Proverbs 8, who comes to us in human form so that we may come to know and be known by God in the most intimate way, and receive from him, personally, the grace of forgiveness that we crave every day. And we have the Holy Spirit, the breath of God which blew over the waters at creation to activate life and which continues to stir up new life in the church that is Christ’s body on earth, now that Christ has ascended to be with his Father. The Spirit surprises and astonishes us at every step, if only we remember to pay attention.

Here is what else we need to know: We have these three persons not as discrete entities, but in relationship, and WE are invited into this relationship. We are invited to the dance. But where is our ticket? How do we get in?

I offer you one portal in Andrei Rublev's great icon of the Holy Trinity, dating from the early 15th century just after the Great Feudal War broke out that shattered peace in the region around Moscow. Rublev painted this icon not as a decoration or even a depiction, but to invite his fellow monks into a holy place so they could keep their hearts centered on God during the political unrest that swirled around them.

The three persons of the Trinity appear here as angels, and we can identify who they are by their clothing: The Holy Spirit on the right wears the clear blue of the sky, wrapped in a robe of fragile green. The Son in the center is draped in an earthy reddish-brown layered with the blue of the heavens. The Father on the left seems to wear all colors in shimmering fabric of indescribable texture. They are seated around a chalice in a configuration that is itself a chalice, if you follow the outline their bodies make around the table.



In addition to their heads, tilted together in conversation, you can see the dance in the movement of their hands. The hand of the Father is raised toward the Son – this is my Son, listen to him. The hand of the Son points around the circle to the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit's hand and body angle is directed back toward the Father. As the Father sends the Son, so as the Son sends the Spirit.

The more we gaze on this icon, the more we find ourselves pulled into this circle to complete it. No longer are we looking in from the outside; rather, we have stepped inside and become part of the flow of energy, absorbing it so that we may radiate this energy out into the world.

“When the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth,” we heard Jesus say in our Gospel reading. This is all truth—the truth of God's heart, overflowing with creativity and love for the world that God made. Are we willing to join those 15th century monks in welcoming this invitation to keep our hearts centered on God in the midst of the unrest that swirls around us?

If we say “yes,” it will compel us to make God's truth known. The truth that is “all truth.” Not what you believe to be true, but what aligns with God's own heart. This is how we discern what is true and what is not—does it mirror who we know God to be, the God of love that flows out into the world through the miracle of these three persons? When we complete the circle and join the dance, we will take these same movements of God out into the world ourselves, each in our own way. Do we dare step through this portal into life, into hope, into truth, into the future that God desires?

The table is set. All things are ready. The Spirit says: Come!