

March 19 -Let Us Humble Ourselves Before God  
St. Patrick's Day invites us to consider our understanding of the Trinity  
The Trinity is so awesome, so loving, our response must be humility  
James 4:8-10, Luke 18:9-14

Friday, at least some of us observed St. Patrick's Day. We saw the St. Pat's decorations in stores; we heard the commercials for celebrations at Irish Pubs. So it is only appropriate that we take some time to think about St. Patrick's teaching about God, the Trinity.

I came across this video of St. Patrick trying to explain the Trinity. Let's take a look....

Got all that? I'm not sure I did either. Add to these "bad" analogies—at least according to this video, we can refer to the movie released recently: The Shack. William Paul Young tells the story of a man devastated by the kidnapping and death of his young daughter. The man seeks information about his daughter's death and comes across three people sharing a "shack" in the remote woods: an African-American woman called "Papa," a younger man and an Asian-appearing woman who seems to float and sweep from place to place. Over a weekend there, the man comes to understand the three as the Trinity and through them and their interactions, he comes to realize God's great love for him.

The Shack, also, has been criticized for not representing the Trinity "appropriately."

So how do we understand the Trinity? I think the one conclusion we all can agree on is that understanding and explaining the concept of three persons as one and one person as three is very challenging. So we're going to use one of the "bad" analogies.

This morning you each received a shamrock. One of the legends that is told of St. Patrick, as you saw in the video, is that he used the shamrock to explain the concept of Trinity: God in three persons, three yet one, one yet three. God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I want you to look at a couple of pictures often seen in the lead-up to St. Patrick's Day and tell me the difference between the items shown.

Yes, in one picture we see a four-leaf clover, traditionally seen as a sign of good luck. Friday my granddaughters wanted to go out into the yard to look for the lucky four-leafed clover. I suggested we wait until summer... Four leaves.

In the other picture, we see the shamrock with three leaves. The plants on the communion table are called shamrocks. Each stem has three leaves. Over time, we have come to equate the four-leafed clover—a sign of luck—with shamrocks. For this message, we have to understand these are two different plants with two different meanings.

One of the three expressions of the Trinity, one of the three persons, is God. This last week, a colleague talked about God in terms of our **Past , the past. What does THAT mean?!**

**As we read scripture it seems that God is the predominant expression of Trinity in OT.** I've heard some people even describe the God of the Old Testament as if that understanding of God is not the same God described in the New Testament, introduced to us in Jesus Christ. Who is this God of the Old Testament?

The names of God, found in Hebrew scripture, help us understand something about this God of the Old Testament

\*Creator

\*YHWH -(Jehovah), YAHWEH

Hebrew does not have vowels – like our a,e,i,o,u. So pronunciation of a Hebrew word was an approximation - how it possibly could be pronounced. Eventually vowels were added as the name is transposed to English: YAHWEH.

\*God introduces self to Moses – I AM

I AM what I AM, I will be what I will be -- a verb

\*Sovereign

\*Adonai - Lord

Other Old Testament names also help us understand who God is:

\*El Shaddai (Lord God Almighty) --Also the one who nourishes,

\*El Elyon (The Most High God)

\*Adonai (Lord, Master)

\*Elohim (God) This name is PLURAL

\*Qanna (Jealous)

And then there are at least nine variations using "Jehovah"

\*Jehovah Jireh (The Lord Will Provide)

\*Jehovah Rapha (The Lord That Heals)

\*Jehovah-Raah (The Lord My Shepherd)

- \*Jehovah Sabaoth (The Lord of Hosts)
- Jehovah Shalom (The Lord Is Peace)
- Jehovah Nissi (The Lord My Banner)
- \*Jehovah Tsidkenu (The Lord Our Righteousness)

What do all these titles and names tell us about God and the nature of God? Each name is only a part of who God is. Taken together:

God is greater, “almightier” than anything we can imagine

God loves us and takes care of us

God is jealous – we are to put God first

And what does this mean for you? For me?

God of our past – our **faith that**

God can do what God promises to do

God can right my wrongdoings of the past

God can forgive my sins, wipe my slate clean

As you consider God Almighty, the Most High God, your shepherd, your provider, the one who heals, do you still choose to live in the past?

Do you go over and over what you have done wrong, reliving your mistakes? Sometimes I do....

We don't have to relive our mistakes!

Instead, let's claim God's promise of forgiveness; leave the past behind because your future, my future, our future is a future of hope

### **Future – hope**

We are observing the season of Lent, preparation for Jesus' crucifixion and then his resurrection three days later. Jesus made possible our future; Jesus has given us hope.

Perhaps you've sung “Oh Happy Day”

Oh happy day, Oh happy day

When Jesus washed my sins away

He taught me how to watch and pray

And living rejoicing everyday

Happy day, happy day

When Jesus washed my sins away

The New Testament recounts the story of Jesus' life, death and resurrection as well as the stories of those who followed Jesus and spread the Good News. 3

But we also know that Jesus is one with the God of the Old Testament: John 1:1 tells us, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

Just as with God, Almighty, Most High, the names given Jesus in scripture help us understand who Jesus was and is.

Some of the many names and titles given Jesus include:

The Word

God's Son                    the Only Begotten Son John 3:16

Beloved Son                Lord

Messiah (Hebrew) Christ (Greek) Matthew 16:16

Redeemer                    Savior

Alpha and Omega (beginning and end) Rev. 22:13

Emmanuel – God with us; fully human, fully divine

We could go back into Isaiah and read the names prophesied:

Wonderful counselor, prince of peace, suffering servant are only three of the many we can list

What do all these titles and names tell us about Jesus, his nature and his life?

Jesus' life taught us how to live, what God expects of us if we are to be God's children

Through Jesus' death we are reconciled with God

Through Jesus' resurrection we are offered eternal life.

We have a future of hope: Christ is already there

Some of us live in the past, reliving our mistakes over and over again. God has offered forgiveness for our mistakes, our sins.

Some of us live in the future.

\*Some of live in the future, worrying about what might go wrong

What if I run out of money before I die?

What if I lose my job?

What if I get a really serious illness....

\*Some of us always are anticipating the “something better” that we will surely find in our future.

My next job will be the right one....

Next month I'll be able to start reading my Bible....

We forgo the opportunities right in front of us thinking there will be something even better in our future. “When I win the lottery...” Have you heard someone say that? 4

\*Some of us do a lot of worrying/thinking about End Times  
Who will be raptured? When? Who is the anti-Christ?  
Dave Nichols, pastor at Kalamazoo FBC, wrote in one of his  
Lenten devotions, “It is easy to be either oblivious to the  
return of Christ or obsessed by it. The important thing is...to  
be ready whenever it might be. None of us has a guarantee  
of when either our lives or our world will end.

Whether living in the future—anticipating what will go wrong,  
anticipating something even better awaits, worrying about End  
Times, Dr. Nichols’ prayer should be our prayer:

Help me live each day fully, Lord, faithful to you for however  
many days I have on this earth.

Jesus is the certainty of our future: our hope.

We read of Christ of the future in Ephesians 1:20-21

“(God) raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand  
in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and  
dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present  
age but also in the one to come.”

We have forgiveness for our past wrongdoings, we have the  
certainty of hope for our future, but we live in the present. We live in  
the here and now. And God is present with us NOW through God’s  
Holy Spirit.

### **Present – love**

We read in Acts 1 of Jesus’ ascension into heaven. The disciples  
and other believers are now on their own. But not for long. As they  
are gathered for Pentecost—fifty days after Passover—God’s Holy  
Spirit descends on them. We can read this account in Acts 2:1-13:  
tongues as if of fire came down on each one; each person heard the  
message in his own language. God’s Holy Spirit came to empower  
Christ’s followers.

God’s Spirit also is mentioned in the Old Testament:

God’s Spirit was present in the cloud that guided the  
Israelites in their forty years in the wilderness.

We read of God’s Spirit WITH God’s people or God’s person  
In Judges, 1 Chronicles, Micah

A colleague stated that we can **love** only in the present—when  
someone is with us. We have the Holy Spirit with us, loving us each  
moment. And we have God’s Holy Spirit with us so we can love God  
each moment. Romans 5:5 even tells us that God has poured out  
God’s love on us through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” **5**

Names given to the Holy Spirit, used to describe God’s Spirit, again  
help us understand the nature of God’s Spirit.

In John 14:16 we read of Jesus’ promise to send a helper, an  
advocate to teach the believers.

In Romans 8:26-27 we read that the Spirit intercedes for us  
when we do not know how to pray

Elsewhere we find the Holy Spirit called Counselor, Guide,  
Witness and Comforter

We have the Holy Spirit guiding, helping, advocating with us and for  
us. We have God’s love in the present, poured out on us through the  
Holy Spirit.

Now what has all of this to do with humbling ourselves before God?  
How we understand God, the Trinity, becomes the lens through  
which we understand others, their motivations, their actions. How  
we understand the Trinity becomes the lens through which we  
understand the world around us.

How we understand the Trinity becomes the lens through which we  
understand our own past, our present and our future.

Do we understand God as a God of judgment (sinners in the hands  
of an angry God—Jonathan Edwards)?

Think about the ways some of us learned to live around one or both  
of our parents who were angry almost all the time...

We may have cautioned ourselves and our siblings, “Don’t  
make dad (or mom) mad.” We walk on eggshells throughout  
our childhood.

Judgment –

If we are Afraid of God, how does that affect how we see  
ourselves—“I can never do anything right; I cannot be forgiven”

If we are afraid of God, how does that affect how we see the world  
around us—“the world is unpredictable; bad things are just  
around the corner”

If we are afraid of God, how does that affect how we see others:  
“They aren’t where they are supposed to be in their relationship  
with God, spiritually”

“People don’t live their beliefs”

I attended a meeting this past week where “God-view” seemed so  
obvious in the words spoken by one of those participating. The  
person said, “Not to sound judgmental,” and then proceeded to  
comment on what’s wrong with the people around him, what people  
do wrong,

Many of his comments were about others and how they aren't "spiritual enough."

I wondered about his God-view: Does he see God as primarily a God of judgment, of love, some combination?

Are we so afraid God is judging us that in order to make ourselves feel better we have to judge others, hold people to standards of Christian behavior that don't happen to be issues for us while ignoring the standards of Christian behavior that are issues for us.....

Do we hold ourselves up as examples of "a good Christian" as we point the finger of condemnation at others who are "bad people" or "bad Christians?"

Our scripture from Luke 18:9-14 reminds us we are to humble ourselves before God. We have such a GREAT God: God who forgives our past sins, Christ who enables us to live victoriously and have the hope of eternal life and God's Holy Spirit who guides and advocates for us every day, through whom God's love is poured out on each of us!

If God can love you this much,  
If God can love me this much,  
If God does love us this much,

*We are called to love one another this much.*

We are called to not think of ourselves more highly than we think of others. Romans 12:3

We are called to recognize we all are sinners and fall short of the glory of God Romans 3:23-24

We are called to love others, to look for the potential in each person.

We are called to see the other person as created in God's image, as are we, and to look for the spark that needs to be fanned into flame.

Father, Son, Holy Spirit: in eternal relationship: one in three, three in one