
The Mystery of Fairies... and the Trinity

A sermon by the Rev. Canon Ashley Carr
Trinity Sunday – Year A

Today is Trinity Sunday, which, in the Episcopal Church, is a principal feast right alongside Christmas and Easter. That's why you're here today, right? Probably not. Here's the thing, I'm not going to go so far as to say that I don't care about the Trinity. That would be preposterous for a priest to say, and it's not entirely true. Of course, I, like most of you, care about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. All that stuff about God eternally being three persons in one is wild and weird and mysterious which I'm totally into. So, technically, I do care about the Trinity.

However, at the advice of some wise friends and teachers, I spent this week reading what the smart theologian types have to say about the doctrine of the Trinity. I read, took notes, scratched my head, processed, and even having studied this in college and seminary, I felt more confused than ever. So then, I took to talking to some smart folks who know about this stuff. One responded via text in no fewer than six paragraph long explanations. Another sent one brief response with cuss words in it. You see, people's trinitarian theology runs the gamut of the complex to the absurd. Still, I was no closer to securing the Ashley Carr Doctrine of the Trinity, patent pending.

It was Thursday. I was frustrated and questioning my intelligence, and I decided to put it all down. Close the books. And I realized that I do care about the Trinity, what's more, I believe in it, but maybe what I don't care about is the intellectual articulation of what the Trinity is and why we should care about it. While the wisdom and dedication of these theologians is impressive and I'm sure that their work is necessary for many of us, it's just didn't interest me, at least not this week.

We're inundated by answers. There are millions of ways to ask questions of robots and sages. We're curious, and that is good. We're confused, and there are answers that we need to find. But there's also this beautiful thing that God created along with us called mystery.

I think it doesn't feel important to me that I understand the mystery of the Trinity because that's what mystery is, right? Incomprehensible but still real to us because we experience it, not because we understand it. Everything we have ever done and will ever do is because of the wild relationship and incomprehensible love among the one who made us, the one who saved us, and the one who equips us for the work of God's will. The Trinity, whether we understand it or not, is who we are. A mystery that has enveloped us and will not let us go.

There is so much in our lives that we feel deeply and believe in but that we don't totally understand. I don't know why I fell in love the way I did at the time that I did with the person I did, but I know that I fell in love. I don't know why I find that viral song about Puerto Rico to be so catchy, but I do and it plays on repeat at our house. I don't know what about my daughter's knobby knees makes me so endeared to her, or what about my son's chubby thighs makes me swoon, but I know the feelings and I know that they're real. Could I study the family systems and psychology to figure out love, or the science of music to figure out why a song is good, sure. But do we really need to do that? Isn't it enough to experience it and to have the assurance that these are real, beautiful, and mysterious God given parts of our lives?

Even the Bible doesn't seem to think we need an explanation of the Trinity.

Today we hear the only two real mentions of the three persons of the Trinity all together in scripture. There's no doctrine, no explanation of how they co-exist, but rather, we hear each of the three names in the context of mandates first from Jesus, and then later on from Paul.

You have to realize that there was no doctrine yet because people were still trying to wrap their minds around Jesus. They were on board with God, but then Jesus threw them for a loop, and on top of that, he talks a lot about this Holy Spirit which seems really wild. At this point in the story, Jesus is just trying to get his friends on board with baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He tells them to go and spread this mysterious good news that hopefully would make more and more people consider this new way of being, a way, a life, that is rooted in divine love, sacrifice, and salvation that only happens in relationship. They don't think they can do it. But he assures them. Jesus tells his friends that they are equipped with an incredible power, the same power that you and I have, the power of God in three persons that will not ever leave us. Jesus tells them to go and live lives that are structured by the power of the Trinity to the point that our lives become symbiotic with the Trinity, constantly in relationship whirling up the kind of love that makes mysterious things possible like peace and salvation.

We can't understand that.

The how and the why are so secondary to the what. God, since the beginning of time, has worked on all of creation through mystery. Everything that we hold so dear is bound up in inexplicable mystery and love that we cannot comprehend. We don't get it, but we know it, we feel it, we experience it, and it's real.

My three year old is fully entrenched in the 'why' stage of life.

Our conversation goes like this:

Mommy, why is there a stop sign?

To keep cars from running into each other.

Why?

So that everyone is safe.

Why?

Because we don't like when people get hurt.

Why?

Because being hurt hurts.

Why?

Because we have nerves and our bodies were designed to feel pain, so we know when something is wrong.

Why?

This is when I give up and say, well, why do you think?

And he quietly considers his response and then says, "fairies."

That was it. Interrogation over. He was satisfied. Fairies.

Maybe this is bad parenting, please spare me your opinions, but I'm sort of okay if he thinks that after we can't explain something anymore, there's something wild like fairies that takes over and carries us through. One day, I might try to explain the difference between fairies and God, but I can see that he already knows about the mystery. He's experiencing what it is to be in relationship with all that God is and all that God has made in and around his tiny little body.

Understanding the Trinity might be important to you, that's great, and I can tell you about so many books to read. Whether or not you find the answers important, I hope that the mystery of the Triune God knocks your socks off and leaves you scratching your head wondering if it was coincidence, fairies, or something mysterious, far beyond our comprehension that must be this thing we call God.
