

The word “Trinity” or “triune” consists of two words put together into one. “Tri” means three—as in triangle or tricycle. “Une” is the other word, which means one—as in the card game Uno. So “Tri-une” means “three-one-ness.” The Triune God is the God who is three-one.

The word “Trinity” does not appear in the Scriptures. It was invented later by teachers who wanted to describe what the Bible says about God. Some people get unnecessarily upset by the absence of this word in the Bible and think that it is wrong to use it. But it is not wrong to make up new words in order to describe what the Bible teaches. There is no law that says we must or must not use the word.

What we cannot do is discard the thoughts that lie behind the word. God being three in one and one in three is not an invention by theologians. It is who God is. He reveals himself to us in his word. Both his three-ness as well as his oneness is the way that the Bible speaks about him.

Consider the many places in the Scriptures where God is spoken of as being distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In our Gospel reading today Jesus says, “It is the Father who glorifies me,” distinguishing the Father from himself. Consider the passage that many rightly understand to be the message of the Scriptures in a nutshell—John 3:16. This passage, also, distinguishes between Father and Son: “God so loved the world that he sent his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

The Bible also speaks about God’s oneness. Consider this passage from Deuteronomy: “Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one.” There are not many gods. There are not three gods. There is only one God. The Athanasian Creed, which we traditionally use on this festival, speaks very clearly about this: “There are not three Eternals, but one Eternal. There are not three Uncreated or three Infinites, but one Uncreated and one Infinite.” These statements are from the plain teachings of Scripture, where—in contrast to other religions—there are not many gods, but one God with a singular will and purpose.

And so the words “Trinity” or “Triune” are nothing other than shorthand for what the Bible teaches: three/one; one/three. This can either be believed or disbelieved. Debate and reasoning do not seem to be of much value. The same thing is true about our Lord Jesus Christ. Either a person will believe or disbelieve the audacious claims about him. There doesn’t seem to be much middle ground.

This is evident in our Gospel reading when Jesus was speaking with some Jewish leaders who not only didn’t believe in him, they didn’t like him. At the beginning of our reading they called him a Samaritan, which was quite an insult. They also said he had a demon.

This seems to have been a common strategy regarding Jesus. They needed to explain the unusual things Jesus was able to do, so they said that he got this power from evil spirits, such as Beelzebub. So which is it? Was Jesus possessed by an evil spirit or did Jesus have the Holy Spirit? There wasn’t much middle ground.

Jesus then went on to say something audacious. He said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” That is quite the promise—not just for their time, but also for ours. If you keep Jesus’s word, you will never see death. Do you believe that? The Jewish leaders certainly

didn't. They said, "**Now we know that you have a demon!**" If what you are saying is true, then the great and holy men who came before you shouldn't have died. "**And yet, Abraham died. The prophets died. Who do you think you are?**"

It didn't occur to them that this troublemaker from Galilee could be the Christ. That would have struck them as absolutely ridiculous. Accordingly, they despised Jesus as a dangerous false prophet and false teacher. This nobody, this Sabbath-breaker, couldn't possibly be able to make it so that someone could not see death.

Interestingly, and, I would argue, contrary to *our* instincts, Jesus didn't back down. He didn't deescalate. He ramped it up, identifying himself with the divine name, "**I am.**" He said, "**I was there at the time of Abraham,**" and when the Jews said, "**How is that possible, you're not even fifty?**" Jesus said, "**Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.**" The Jews knew exactly what he was saying, and it drove them wild. "**How dare he make himself out to be God?**" They picked up stones to throw at him, but they didn't succeed, for his time had not yet come.

So is Jesus God or not? Will those who keep his Word never see death or will they? Is Jesus the divine agent for righteous change or is he a tool of the devil? Perhaps the question that is more relevant for our times would be: "Is Jesus a real, historic figure—someone, for example, who will come again to judge the living and the dead, or is this a leftover from a more primitive worldview that has no believability left for us today?" All of these questions can be answered only by belief or unbelief.

Faith is a big deal. The Scriptures say, "**Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.**" When we believe God we submit ourselves to his Word and will. By faith we want his kingdom to come. By faith we want his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. "**Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**" We do not yet see how Jesus's Word can come true, we can only believe or disbelieve. Either we will "**never see death,**" as Jesus said, or death will have its way with us. There is no middle ground. The church is not a debating society. It is a product of the Holy Spirit working unshakable conviction in the hearts of believers that Jesus Christ is God and Lord.

That is why we gather. Not because we've figured it all out, but because the Holy Spirit has created faith in our hearts. We believe what God has said. We trust the words of Jesus. And though we still walk by faith and not by sight, we are not uncertain. Jesus has kept his word. He has carried our sin. He has overcome death. He has risen. And he has promised that those who keep his word will never see death. That is not a theory. That is the truth. That is our hope. That is our salvation.

So do not waver. Do not apologize for believing what the Scriptures say. Do not hesitate to confess that Jesus is the great "**I am,**" whom the Father has sent, and in whom the Holy Spirit has worked faith, opening your heart to believe.

Blessed are all who put their trust in the Triune God. Amen.