

Luke 3:21-37

When Christians use the word 'trinity' we mean that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Spirit is God. And, at the same time, there is only one God.

Jehovah's Witnesses take God quite seriously. They reject the idea that God is three in one.

Mormons reject the trinity, so does the Jewish faith. Islam calls it blasphemous.

The biggest books on the trinity usually end with the word, 'mystery'. I am not going to try to build an airtight case for the Christian doctrine of the trinity this morning. That is for others to do. And it is worth doing.

What I invite you to do with me this morning, here, early in Luke's gospel is to notice a moment and listen closely for what we might learn about God and what we might learn about following Jesus.

It happens when all the people are repenting and being baptized by John in the Jordan river. Just like all the people who were baptized for forgiveness of sins, or have ever been baptized since as babies or adults, Jesus was baptized.

We think, "he didn't need to be baptized... but Luke doesn't dwell on that. He is more interested in what happens next. And in what happens next, we see the Son and the Spirit, and we hear the Father's voice.

The Son in prayer, the Spirit descending and the Father speaking.

It's a bit like being in a restaurant and glancing over at the next table and seeing three members of one family. And you can tell right away that these are three people who love each other and who are on the same page with each

other. Or, maybe like walking past a house at night where the lights are on and the curtains are open and you see a family scene that tells you exactly the same thing. These are people who love and care for each other.

In this moment in Luke 3, Jesus is praying.

He is putting his trust into words. He is actively trusting the Father with the stuff of his life. His words might be words of joy or wonder, of thanks, or of asking for help or wisdom or comfort or direction. Years earlier, Jesus had lost all track of time in his Father's house (the temple), now he is praying outside in the water where he has just been baptized, or maybe on the bank.

He is praying because he loves and trusts the Father. Like we do too.

As Jesus is praying, the sky somehow opens up and the Holy Spirit comes down and lands on him in the form of a dove. (If you have ever visited Liz Wierenga you might know what that felt like)

My friends Eugene and Fred (Boring and Craddock) say that Luke wants us to know that the Spirit is not just our emotions when we are really focused on God. And even though the Spirit works in us and through us and with us, from the inside out, the Spirit of God is yet separate from us, like fire, like wind, like a dove. They say that when we are speaking of God and of spiritual things we have to leave some loose ends and not talk nonsense, but not try to have everything fit into a nice tight system. "**This** is how the Spirit works." Jesus himself said that the Spirit is like the unpredictable wind. It is easier to see that the Spirit has come than to say where or how it is coming.

Here, as Jesus is praying, as later at Pentecost when the church was gathered to pray, as when **we pray** the Holy Spirit comes. The Spirit is the Spirit of full aliveness to God and to others. We could say, “the Holy Personality, Holy Attitude, Holy Passion, Holy Love, Holy Presence, Holy Comfort, Holy Encouragement”.

This is me thinking out loud, but in this picture of the Spirit in bodily form as a dove landing on Jesus I wonder if we are invited to see the wild, free Spirit of God like a wild and free creature that breaks the rules about how wild things are afraid of people, and comes close. You know the kinds of moments I mean. Is that what is happening here?

A voice speaks from out of the heavens. It is the voice of the Father. Few things show character more than how parents speak to their children. In these few words we learn much about the Father.

“You are my beloved Son, in you I am well-pleased”.

As the other gospel writers tell this part of the story, they describe the voice as saying, “this is my son”. The words there are words of introduction, they are addressed to the audience, words from a loving and proud father.

Luke lets us listen in to personal words. He shows us the heart of the Father and his relationship with his son. This Father’s love is deep and close and warm. This is a Father who would run down the road to hug a wandering child who was stumbling home. (cf Luke 15)

You are my **beloved** son. “Beloved” is one of those words that has slipped away from us and we need to do all we can to hang on to it. In some

places the NIV has rendered this powerful Greek word as “dear friends” (cf 1 Peter 4:12) But I would rather be one person’s beloved than have a crowd of even ‘dear friends’.

“Beloved” means, “cherished, esteemed, held dear”. “You are the one I hold in my heart”.

“In you I am well-pleased”. “I delight in you”. “It makes me happy every time I think of you”. “You are my sunshine”.

These words of love tell Jesus exactly who he is and always will be. “I am God’s beloved Son, He delights in me”. He finds his identity in his Father’s love.

Please remember that the Father speaks these words before Jesus has **done** anything.

So we see and hear a glimpse of the trinity, a look as through a window or across a room into the inner life of God. And we can say, “God is open, intimate, vulnerable, passionate, untamed love.” Questions about “how does it work, the three-in-oneness, even our Trinitarian formulas seem almost rude, pointy headed, out of place.

And now I will tell you a mystery. This Holy Family, that we see in close relationship of prayer and blessing and affirmation and pride, this family extends the family love, opens the way for us to us. That, by the way is the definition of grace, not ‘undeserved love’ so that the stress is on the ‘undeservedness’, but, intimate, familial love that extends to strangers and treats strangers as friends. (see ‘hesed’ in any good concordance)

God invites us to the table, invites us into the family. In the rest of the gospel Luke will tell us how this is accomplished, but even more, how we are to follow. That is why he does not linger over this scene, but says immediately, “Now Jesus was about 30 years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, “so it was thought”, of Joseph.... and so on, name by boring name all the way back, back, back, until Luke shows that through all of the misunderstanding, Jesus is the Son of God.

“So it was thought”... in that phrase is the tension of misunderstanding. It is the tension of a solid, secure, loving, strong identity being questioned and challenged. It is **the** tension in Jesus’ life.

All three of the temptations try to pick at Jesus’ identity. Two of them even begin with, “if you are the Son of God”.

After his first sermon in his home town, Nazareth, the people say, “isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

Over and over things will happen in Jesus’ life that we could say, “that should not happen to the Son of God!”

Let’s go to Luke 22:70. Jesus has been led before the council of the elders, the chief priests and teachers of the law. They all ask, “Are you then the Son of God?”

He replied, “you are right in saying I am”.

And he is killed because they thought different. They thought he was the son of Joseph.

The one they think is the son of Joseph is in the grave for three days. It seems that everyone was right. He was just one more name in one more obituary.

Until the Sunday that changed the world forever.

The Father would not abandon his beloved Son to death. Through the power of the Holy Spirit the beloved Son, apple of his Father's eye, was raised to life again.

And now, through the resurrection, we too are invited into the family. We are invited in as beloved sons, beloved daughters of God.

If you go to the beginning of the book of Acts you will hear unmistakable echoes of what we hear in Luke.

Listen, this is the risen Jesus, speaking to his followers, "I am going to send you what my Father has promised, but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high".

Forty days later, **as they are praying** the Spirit comes down on them and at the end of the day 3,000 people (all the people?) are baptized.

We are invited into the family.

Paul uses the word 'adoption' when he thinks of what this means. We might think of plane loads of Haitian orphans, we have seen them on the news. Traumatized, shivering, disoriented and afraid, landing in a Canadian January, coming to a family that will take them in and love them.

One fourteen year old boy, who got what was happening, grinned and planted a kiss on the cheek of his new papa.

Through baptism we are claimed as the sons and daughters of God. That is who we are. Beloved sons. Beloved daughters. Cherished. God delights in you and me.

Our deepest identity, deeper even than the identity of being children of our birth or adopted parents, is that we are beloved children of God.

Let me be clear. Even more than you are a child of your parents, you are a child of God.

Jesus had to remember and hang on to that truth because it was constantly challenged.

We who follow our older brother (Hebrews ) have no reason to expect any different in this life. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are. (now here is the identical tension) The reason the world does not know us, is that it did not know him. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is". (1 John 3:1-2)

The way forward is never easy, but it has a trinity shape.

We follow God the Son together into a life of prayer.

God the Holy Spirit comes to help us when we pray. We may count on him.

Our Father says to us, "You are my beloved son, you are my beloved daughter.

I delight in you". (Zephaniah 3, 1 John 3:1)

May the Lord be gracious to you. May the Lord be gracious to me. And all God's people said, Amen.