

Holy Trinity! Look at everyone we have here today! Welcome to all of our guests; Sabrina's family and friends, and it's good to see all of you who are here even though you're probably still exhausted from our wildly successful Tag Sale yesterday.

Let me set the scene a little with a story. Mack was just about to knock on the door, and he raised his fist to do so, but the door flew open and he was looking directly into the face of a large, beaming, African American woman. A man and woman joined her standing there around Mack. The smiling woman put her arm around Mack's shoulders and said, "Okay, we know who you are but we should probably introduce ourselves to you. I am the housekeeper and the cook. You may call me El-ousia. Or, if you prefer you could call me Papa. "And I," interrupted the man, who looked to be in his thirties. "I try to keep things fixed up around here. I enjoy working with my hands."

"You look as if you're from the Middle East," Mack said to the man.

"I am Hebrew, from the house of Judah."

"Then you are....Jesus?"

"Yes. It has become my common name but my mother called me Yeshua."

Then an Asian woman stepped closer and deflected Mack's attention. "And I am Sarayu," she said as she tilted her head in a slight bow. My name is Sanskrit for wind. Thoughts tumbled over themselves as Mack struggled to figure out what all this was about. Was one of these people God? Since there were three of them maybe this was a Trinity sort of thing. But two were women, and none of them white. Then again, why had he naturally assumed that God would be white.

Mack struggled to ask, "Which one of you is God? "

"I am," said all three in unison.

Mack looked from one to the next, and even though he couldn't begin to grasp what he was seeing and hearing, he somehow believed them. ⁱ

This is the way that the author William Paul Young describes the scene in which Mack, the protagonist in the story, meets the Holy Trinity in his popular book *The Shack*. A few of my friends and I have been reading this book recently, and so it came to mind when I was thinking about all the different ways we have sought to portray and understand the Holy Trinity of God the Father, God the Son Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit. *The Shack* may or **may not** be helpful to you in illuminating the nature of God, but for thousands of readers to whom talk of the theological doctrine of the Trinitarian God is incomprehensible, or a sleeper, this book has been eye opening.

St. Athanasius, back in about the year 350 or so wrote extensively with the same goal in mind. He too wanted to try to make the God of our understanding, the F, S and H G something that the people of his day could understand. He wrote:

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one, the Glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The father uncreate, the son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate. The father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible. ⁱⁱ

You know, I have to say, sometimes the whole darn thing seems incomprehensible to me. If you'd like to read more of his creed, you can find the Creed of Athanasius on page 864 in your prayer book.

And yet....and yet... we can't just say it's incomprehensible and give up on trying to understand the Trinity. It remains one of the central features of our Christian faith; a mystery, and a blessing.

Our readings for this morning show us that although we may not find the word Trinity in the Hebrew or Christian scriptures, the essence of God as three persons is all over the place. Our passage from Paul this morning is one of the most beautiful from his letter to the Romans. In just a very few words Paul tells us how the Triune God reaches us through faith, and fills us with grace and virtue.

And we find that faith through our **experiences** that lead us from suffering to endurance to character to hope, as Paul says. And hope does not disappoint us.

There will always be those Christians who say, "I have no time for an out of date, out of touch notion like the Trinity". But those are probably ones who have not experienced God through the words of Jesus or through the breath of the Spirit ...yet. Paul says, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

This morning that image of pouring love into our hearts will become a reality as we pour water on Sabrina's head. How wonderful is this day!

We are so blessed to have you and your mother as part of our community of faith, Sabrina. For those of us who were baptized long ago (many of us as babies) we can participate in the sacrament of baptism again through your baptism. So, when you are standing up here feeling a little embarrassed for all the attention, keep in mind that you are being baptized with water and the Holy Spirit for yourself, and for all of us too.

Remember that in your baptism the simple and crucial element of water which cools, refreshes and gives us life, becomes the tool, a sacrament that God uses to pour hope, faith and love into our hearts. We only get to have that experience one time in our lives. And you get to have that experience, after our many Sunday mornings of preparation, today!

As Sabrina becomes part of the Family of Christ she comes into relationship with every Christian who has been baptized since the first baptism of Jesus in the Jordan when the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and God said, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

We all have been drawn into the great circle of relationship that exists between the three persons of the Trinity. None is greater, none is lesser, all give of themselves to the glory of the others.

In the Gospel of John Jesus says “[The Spirit] will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine.

There is no hierarchy in this relationship because each member of the Trinity is an equal who is a different aspect of God.

I’m thinking back to our Tag Sale yesterday and how this parish came together to work in a great circle of relationship. It’s not an easy task to get all that stuff collected, sorted, priced, out on the tables. We depend on each other to make the food, show up to man the tables, sell the items, welcome the visitors, and offer the hospitality of our bathrooms and water fountain. Then there’s the clean up. There it a lot to do, and it would be very easy for bad feelings to develop.

But when we depend on each other to hold our own, and do our part; when we give of ourselves without an expectation of repayment but for the good of the Church and to the glory of God, we are working in that right relationship which mirrors...imperfectly, but mirrors the relationship of the creator, redeemer and sustainer of our being.

There’s always room for improvement. But we seek progress, since perfection will probably always elude us.

The words of our opening hymn which we call St. Patrick’s Breastplate are actually thought to be St. Patrick’s words. It is an example of a “lorica” or breastplate prayer. In the old days, soldiers preparing for a battle would pray as they put on their various pieces of armor so that each one of them would be as effective as possible in protecting the wearer in the heat of battle. Come to think of it, priests have been known to say lorica prayers as they put on each of their vestments before going out to do battle with the congregation.

Legend has it that Patrick, sang this lorica as he and his followers prepared to travel to a town called Tara where they planned to proclaim the Christian faith. In the legend the pagan Irish king Loegaire Mac Neill and the druids were planning to attack Patrick but the power of the lorica caused Patrick and his company to appear to be a herd of deer travelling through the woods. Patrick reached Tara safely and the prayer he sang became known as “The Deer’s Cry”.ⁱⁱⁱ

We call upon the strong name of the Trinity ourselves this morning to guide us into all truth, to show us true companionship in our human relationships, and to protect us from the evil that exists in the world.

“We bind unto ourselves today the virtues of the starlit heaven, the glorious sun’s life giving ray, the whiteness of the moon at even. The flashing of the lightning free, the whirling wind’s tempestuous shocks, the stable earth, the deep salt sea, around the old eternal rocks.”

ⁱ William Paul Young. The Shack. Excerpted from pages 85-89.

ⁱⁱ The Athanasian Creed. Book of Common Prayer pg. 864.

ⁱⁱⁱ Raymond Glover. The Hymnal 1982 Companion. Hymn 370.