

TRINITY
Holy Comforter Church
The Rev. John E. Shields
May 30, 2010

Just in case you did not get one of our several efforts to communicate in the last twenty four hours – I have the very sad duty to report to you that Carter Lofton died early Saturday morning.

If you had not heard that before, I am certainly sorry for the shock that this news is causing you, and believe me when I say I know how you feel.

For I too have been shocked by this news and have found myself a number of times having difficulty processing the very idea that this could occur.

Today is Trinity Sunday. It is a preacher's challenge --- it is for this preacher anyway. Carter and I were joking about Trinity Sunday just one day last week – he was in the hospital at the time.

I told him that it was his Sunday to preach and Trinity was the Sunday. He replied that he must have preached on the Trinity at least 10 times – which proves that a lot of the preachers that Carter worked with were like me – they didn't want to preach on the Trinity.

Carter was pretty fearless, and he would give it his best shot whenever given the chance.

Of course preaching can be a dangerous pastime – we will often launch into a text telling you that what we are talking

about cannot be explained and then spend twenty minutes not explaining it.

If you've been to many Trinity Sunday services, you've heard lots of explanations of the Trinity.

(Paratrooper blew off course and landed in a tree)

“Where am I?” he called down to a man passing by.

“You are in a tree.” Said the man

“You must be a preacher.” Said the paratrooper

“How did you know?” said the man.

The paratrooper answers: “What you say is very true, but not of much practical value”

St. Patrick is said to have explained the Trinity to the Celts by reference to the Shamrock.

The Trinity is often explained using the analogy of the individual – I am a (father, husband, and brother).

Another analogy refers to the chemical substance --- H₂O ---, which manifests itself as ice, water, and steam.

I am particularly fond of St. Augustine's reference to the Holy Trinity as the Lover, the Beloved, and the Love that exists among them.

The doctrine of the Trinity does not explicitly appear in the Bible; rather it is a concept that grew out of Christian experience of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I always think of Edward Freas on Trinity Sunday. Edward is a saintly person. He was 101 when he passed away several years ago. Ed was always in attendance at Christ Church,

Walnut Cove on Sunday mornings. When I was Vicar of Christ Church, Edward sang in our 4 – 8 member choir and was a lay reader. The reason I always think of Edward on Trinity Sunday is that he always brought me three leaves from his Sassafras tree.

Each leaf is shaped differently. One is a large, rounded leaf with an unbroken edge --- a sort of fat oval shape. The second leaf is more V shaped --- a kind of rounded V. The third leaf --- you've guessed it --- right?

The third leaf has three rounded points.

All of the leaves are different. All of the leaves are Sassafras leaves.

Edward Freas brought me the three leaves every Trinity Sunday because he knew that, try as I might, I would not be able to explain the unexplainable --- but that I might make more progress with visual aids.

Today we sing, “Holy, Holy, Holy – God in three persons, blessed Trinity.”

The Blessed Trinity --- Trinity Sunday.

We believe in the Trinity --- one God in three persons --- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We affirm that belief in our creeds, our prayers, our music and our worship.

We believe ---

Episcopalians believe --- in the Trinity and in lots of other things as well. My friend, the Rev. Bill Wells says that

Episcopalians believe in everything from four-barrel carburetors to the virgin birth.

I read in the Anglican Digest Easter edition what Episcopalians really believe.

“Episcopalians believe in ecumenical dialogue, because they are certain that after all is said and done, everyone else is bound to become Episcopalian.

Episcopalians believe that anything worth doing is especially worth doing if it has an obscure title attached to it. (e.g. sexton, thurifer, Suffragan, coadjutor, canon, dean.)

Likewise, Episcopalians believe that any place worth visiting is greatly enhanced by a name that only obliquely describes it (e.g., nave, narthex, sacristy, undercroft.)

Episcopalians generally believe that they are the only people God trusts enough to take the summer off from church.

Episcopalians believe that anthems are most efficacious if sung in Latin, especially during Lent.

Some Episcopalians believe Rite I is the best expression of the liturgy. Some believe Rite II is better. Some Episcopalians haven't noticed the difference; they just hope the whole thing gets over in one hour.” (St. John's, Tallahassee, Fla. as quoted in The Anglican Digest)

**We do believe in the Trinity. We began our service today
“Blessed be God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”**

We affirmed the Trinity in the saying or singing of the Gloria.

In the opening prayer – the Collect for Purity we say:

“Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord.”

In just a few moments we will say “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty...” and we will say, “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ the only son of God...” and we will say, “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life...”

All this and one God ----

Look at it this way. The persons of the Trinity are expressions of God.

You may say, “ That is hard for me to grasp right now, I relate to the Father as Creator, I can see Jesus as Son, but the Holy Spirit just gets by me.”

That is fine. The Holy Spirit can handle your problem. The church can handle your doubt. We won't crumble and close up because we haven't reached universal understanding on the doctrine of the Trinity.

Some of us relate better to the Son, others to the Father and others to the Spirit. Our feelings and our understanding changes with time and circumstances --- and that's ok.

These are aspects of God. Someone said that she sees the Trinity like three doors --- if you open any one of them you see God.

Maybe there are times when only one or two of those doors seem possible for you.

That is fine. Our faith allows doubt and questions.

At the end of Matthew's gospel it says – there were eleven disciples, and then it says, “When they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted.”

“...But some doubted.”

Even with some having doubted, Jesus gives the disciples the commission --- “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

And do you know what?

They did.

They went forth and baptized and we are heirs of their faithfulness.

Apparently, the disciples went forth and did what Jesus commanded in spite of doubt and misgiving.

Today we celebrate the being of God – we celebrate the Holy Trinity.

“We must remember that the Being of God is a mystery. As Christians we are called to worship, not fully to understand the Unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity.” (Ibid.)

The Trinity cannot be explained --- it must be experienced and praised. The Trinity is not so much a doctrine to be intellectually grasped as it is an experience of the holy mystery of God's ultimate self-disclosure.” (Synthesis, June 10, 1990)

Today recognize the glory of creation, and realize that humankind has the responsibility of caring for -- this fragile earth our island home, and give thanks to God the Father, creator of heaven and earth.

This day think about the plight of the poor, the sick, the homeless and those in prison, remember and give thanks to God the Son, Jesus who asks you to walk with him as your brother and remember that he tells us “When you have cared for the least of these, you have cared for me.” Remember the example our brother Carter gave to us in reaching out in service to others in Christ’s name.

This day as your are inspired to pray for peace in the world, as you are given insight into a vexing problem that has been bothering you, as you feel the need or even urge to join with others and come to this table, give thanks to God the Holy Spirit who empowers sustains and comforts you.

(Not so much what people have understood as what they did with it.)

Finally come to the Eucharist – come to this table with your brothers and sisters. The relationship among you is the Holy Spirit in action. Be fed with the tangible fruits of God’s creation as they are consecrated into the body and blood of Jesus. Give yourself to the mystery of God.

**In the name of God: the Father who created you.
In the name of God: the Son, Jesus who redeemed you.
In the name of God: the Holy Spirit who sanctifies and sustains you. Amen.**