

Sermon Text – Sunday, May 31, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus

**1st Reading: Genesis 1:1&2, 1:31-2:4; 2nd Reading: 2 Corinthians 13:11-13
Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20 “hmmm”**

This is Trinity Sunday. God in three persons--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Do we fully understand this wonderful doctrine? No, but some of us will fight for it.

There is an ancient story about St. Augustine. One day he took a break from writing about the Trinity to take a walk along the seashore. There he came across a child with a little pail, intently scooping up a pail full of water out of the ocean, then walking up the beach and dumping it out into the sand, then going back down to scoop out another pail of water to pour into the sand, etc.

Augustine asked the child what he was doing, and the child explained that he was "emptying the sea out into the sand."

When the Bishop tried to gently point out the absurd impossibility of this task, the child replied, "Ah, but I'll drain the sea before you understand the Trinity."

There's truth to that child's comment. We don't understand the Trinity, but there was a time when battles were fought over church doctrine, and even today churches are being split over whose interpretation of the Word is correct.

I admit that I have a tough time trying to describe the Christian Doctrine of *Trinity*. An explanation is not found in scripture; there is nothing that I can find in a bible dictionary or concordance that mentions *Trinity*. I expect that most of us really don't understand the concept of *Trinity*, even though we might say that we do understand. The doctrine of Trinity is a concept that has been around in Christianity for centuries. This is what I read in a very good reference book titled *The Bible for Dummies*,

“Although a debated issue during Christianity's early history, the prevailing view became that God exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. According to this doctrine, which is called the Trinity, these are not three gods, but one God revealing Himself in three persons. . . .The doctrine of the Trinity is important not only because it is the official stance of orthodox Christianity, but because it has tremendous implications for how you understand Jesus' life. According to this doctrine, God came to earth in order to teach humankind about his truth and to show them his love. For this kindness, God was condemned as a heretic and rebel and then crucified. Yet, as a further demonstration of love, God forgave those who mocked and killed him.”¹

¹ Jeffrey Gdoghegan, PhD & Michael Homan, PhD. *The Bible for Dummies*. Wiley. 2003. Print. 258

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I wonder if bible dictionaries, reference books, and concordances don't touch the subject because all of that is still confusing. The scriptures we read this morning touch on the concept by mentioning Jesus Christ, God, and the Holy Spirit but without giving us the "three in one" explanation. Many early church scholars and theologians claim the Trinity as a mystery – something that is beyond human comprehension. But don't we want more, don't we want a deeper understanding?

I know that there are teachers and science-oriented people in this congregation. People who might like things "ordered" and crystal clear, for people like that, I wonder if the doctrine of Trinity creates doubt. We read in Matthew's gospel that although the eleven disciples worshiped Jesus when he appeared to them after the resurrection, some doubted. They worshiped and they doubted – if these eleven men who spent three years with Jesus; who saw him crucified and then risen from the dead; who lived with him and ate with him in the forty days between his resurrection and ascension into heaven – if they had doubt we should not be ashamed to also doubt. We are only human and I think God can handle doubt.

The message for today is about the doctrine of Trinity and it is about doubt. I am learning that we can question the doctrine of Trinity while not abandoning our faith in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Having doubts and asking questions does not mean we are leaving religion behind, maybe it means we are moving to another room in religion's house. Maybe it is a room in the same building, a room connected by doorways and hallways to what we consider traditional religion. Maybe there is a room where we can question yet remain in the same household of faith.²

So, I am learning that faith and doubt are not mutually exclusive. In a commentary on this passage best-selling author Barbara Brown Taylor asks this question, "Does the existence of doubt in the worship of Jesus mean that something is wrong, or does it mean that something is right – when people with no idea how deep the water really is step out on it anyway, trusting that even their doubt cannot separate them from the love of God?"³ There is something sacred and holy about worshiping through our doubt. Think about the traditional "definition" of faith – "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Simply put, the biblical definition of faith is

² Peter Choi. "The Room Next Door to Faith" *The Christian Century* May 2026 Issue published May 6, 2026. retrieved online from www.christiancentury.org 05/12/26

³ Barbara Brown Taylor "Matthew 28:16-20 – Homiletical Perspective" *Feasting on the Gospels: Matthew vol. 2.* eds. Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elixabeth Johnson. WJK. 2013. Print. 369-373

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“trusting in something you cannot explicitly prove.” No wonder some “contemporary thinkers” doubt.

To those of you who claim to have no doubt at all – who feel as if their beliefs are true and correct over and above anything else I say – really? I commend you but I know that even those closest to Jesus had doubts. I know that even the most schooled theologians and the most faithful saints in the tradition of the church had doubts. It is out of the struggle with doubts and from the searching for answers that most church doctrine is born – it is that struggle with doubt that gave us the doctrine of Trinity that we explore on Trinity Sunday. Faith is built on the traditions of our ancestors in the church, and as we ourselves struggle with doubt our faith is adapted for new challenges.

Whether or not you have doubts about church doctrine, doubts about the doctrine of Trinity you can still worship God and Jesus. Even with doubt you can still believe in God's eternal presence with you through God's Holy Spirit. In his final speech to the disciples Jesus states, “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” He uses basically the same words God spoke to Isaac at Beersheba, “Do not be afraid, for I AM with you” (Genesis 26:24). Jesus says, “I am with you” and those words take us back to what we heard as his given name at the announcement of his birth to Joseph – Emmanuel God with us. Even though *Trinity* is not explicitly stated you have in that statement the Trinitarian formula. Jesus speaks God's name; I AM and promises eternal presence – through the Spirit or advocate.

Still, we may doubt how God can be present as three in one, we cannot say that there isn't mystery surrounding that promise to “be with you always, to the end of the age.” We do not worship three gods, we do not worship Jesus alone, or the Spirit without Jesus or God the Father. We worship one God, made known to us through Jesus the Son and through the Holy Spirit as our guide and counselor.

I don't think God is offended when we cannot quite grasp the concept of the doctrine of Trinity. It is, after all, a human construct born from our struggles with doubt. Because it is a human construct it might just be up to us to struggle with our doubts and try to figure it all out. The thing is, do we have to have it all figured out? Can we not, as the disciples did, worship even through our doubts?

We are members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and although we do not hold to any particular doctrines nor do we have an “official” interpretation of scripture, we are encouraged to interpret scripture in the light of all sciences and through the insight of Christian tradition. The truth is that God

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did not sit at a desk and write the bible – God inspired human testimony through divine revelation. The bible we have evolved through extended periods of oral transmission, scores of translations, and revised versions. We are able to approach biblical teachings through an understanding that combines faith, reason, and doubt. The bible we have contains metaphor, parable, and symbolism to convey meaning rather than a factual report. “It is not faith in the book that Christians hold, but faith in the grace of God as revealed through the book.”⁴

All that said, what is a community of believers to do with doubt and worship? It is the grace of God that enables us to wrestle with doubt and questions while not always finding the answers we seek. It is the grace of God that draws us into the fellowship of believers to worship even when we doubt. It is the grace of God that fell on those eleven as they stood on that mountain and worshiped Jesus. They worshiped even though some doubted.

We can know that Jesus’ promise to “be with you, even to the end of age” is a promise made to us even though we doubt how that is possible. We can accept that God is present with us through the Holy Spirit and made known to us through Jesus the Christ – even though we have doubts about how that is possible. There are a lot of mysteries in scripture but nevertheless we believe in one God and confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. We believe that in the communion of the Holy Spirit we are joined together in discipleship and in obedience to Christ. This is what we believe even though we have doubts about how all of it is possible, we believe because there is something deep within us that makes belief and worship possible even through doubt.

One final word, I wonder if the church were more honest about its struggle with doubt would unbelievers in our world find the Christian Church more credible? If we could admit to not having all the answers and not having everything figured out, would others be more willing to join us in our doubts? Could we not struggle together?

⁴ D. Duane Cummins *A Handbook for Today’s Disciples in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* fifth edition. Chalice Press. 2017. Print. 29