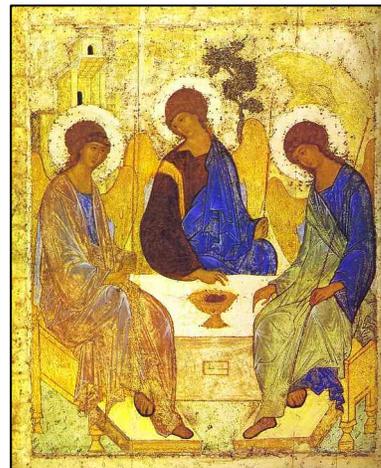


## A Table for 3 (or more): Trinity Sunday

Over the course of our years we have all received many invitations: birthday invitations, wedding invitations, party invitations, invitations to fundraising dinners. In each case we are invited to events which promise to be worth the time and effort of us getting ready and showing up. We are promised cake and games, meaningful time with friends, an occasion to celebrate with others, an opportunity to give to a worthwhile cause, a chance to purchase some item or other that will improve our kitchens or bolster our collection of accessories. In short, we are promised community. Fellowship with others. An opportunity to meet others, to be gracious to others, to laugh with others, perhaps to listen to others tell their stories. Although it is quite possible to go to a party and sit all alone like a bump on a lump, most of us wouldn't go if that were how we felt about it. If you decide to accept the invitation, you are probably expecting to have a good time.



In the 1400s, a Russian artist named Andrei Rublev, painted an icon which came to be known as the Trinity. Originally, the painting was to represent the visit of the three angels to Abraham at the Oaks of Mamre, but Rublev omitted Abraham in this icon, and just kept the three angels. This icon has become one of the most famous paintings on the Trinity throughout history. So let's take a look, and figure out what it has to do with a party invitation and scripture and being disciples of Christ.

You will notice that the three figures look virtually identical in the face, but are wearing different clothes. They are sitting around the table with a chalice at the front of the table. It is difficult to see, but the item in the chalice is a slain lamb. The place directly in front of the chalice is empty. There is an empty spot at the table. Each of the figures is holding a staff and in the background there is a house on the left and a tree in the centre.

God the Father is the figure on the left, looking at both Jesus (in the middle) and the chalice on the table – the sacrifice that re-united God with his people. His robes combine the colouring of the other two figures' clothes. He is also the only figure with his hand raised, pointing in the direction of the other two in blessing. When the early church was trying to figure out the nature of the Trinity (we are still trying to sort it out), they often described the Son and the Spirit as the two hands of God – both proceeding from the Father. The Father accomplishes his kingdom work through the ministry of the Son, his death and resurrection, and the continuing ministry of the Son through the Holy Spirit.

The figure of the Spirit (on the right) is dressed in a blue heavenly robe with a green robe wrapped over top. The Spirit of creation moves in sky and water, breathes in heaven and earth.

The Son (Jesus) is the figure in the middle who always looks to the Father, and who only does what he sees the Father doing. He is wearing a blue outer garment indicating his heavenly nature, and there is a golden sash over his shoulder representing his perfect, precious, and worthy kingship. His right hand shows the traditional 2 fingers representing his humanity and his divinity. His left hand is pointed toward the Spirit. As the Father sends the Son, so the Son sends the Spirit and the Spirit sends and empowers the Church.

The table is white – both as an altar and as the table of the communion between Father, Son, and Spirit. Just as Abraham showed hospitality to the 3 angels who came to visit him, this is the place of God's hospitality. And we are welcomed and invited to the table. And this table isn't just any table, but sitting around it are the Father, Son, and Spirit. Not only are we invited to share in the sacrifice of the Lamb, but also to come enter into the communion that is shared between Father, Son, and Spirit. We

are invited to complete the circle – to join the table, to partake of the communion and fellowship of love found there.

There is much more to be said about the painting, and all of it is helpful for us in understanding the nature of the Triune God of grace and the way this God works in the world and in our lives to redeem, reconcile, to bring health and wholeness. But this isn't a religious art class. What I want us to do now is to think a little about the how we might respond to this invitation to the table that the painting depicts. Think a little about the open space in front of the chalice – in front of the slain lamb. Think about the invitation to join the table, the communion of love between Father, Son, and Spirit. Think about how God both sends us out in to the world as his body, but also invites us in to his body. There is a simultaneous outward and inward orientation – from God and to God.

Now, let us revisit our passage from Romans (Romans 5:1-5).

**Since we are justified by faith,**

We have been justified not by our own faith, which fails and falters and is weak, but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ in his obedience to his father. It isn't our faith that saves us, but the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to be the only true covenant keeper – of the covenant that God makes with his people that his people can never uphold on their own, and which is upheld only by Jesus Christ. Jesus, on the cross, redeems all of humanity in such a way that he faithfully keeps the covenant on our behalf as God's faithful human covenant partner – God keeps the covenant by keeping it himself.

**we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,**

The peace that we experience is the reality of wholeness, health, rest, shalom with God. There is nothing between us but love. There is no barrier that can keep us from rest in God. Through Jesus Christ, we are restored to full righteousness (right relatedness) with God.

**through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand**

It is only through Jesus, in Jesus, and by means of Jesus that we are able to receive the grace of God that not only invites us to the table, but also enables us to approach the table with, as Paul says, boldness. This is the grace that allows us to share in the intimate life of God

**and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God**

Which we do when we accept the invitation to enter into the communion of God and are welcomed there with open arms and open hearts. As we do this, we proclaim our the hope of our faith, and share all the goodness of God.

**And not only that, we boast in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."**

God is a communion of love which is shared between the Father, Son, and Spirit. As God sends the Son, and the Son sends the Spirit, so love is sent out – that is, poured into our hearts, by this Holy Spirit – which has indeed been given to us as we bear witness to at Pentecost.

**Faith** (of Jesus), **peace with God** (through, in, and by Jesus), **grace** (through, in and by Jesus and enabled by the Spirit), **God's love poured into our hearts** (because the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us.) Pretty good party I'd say.

In addition to speaking about the invitation to join God at his table of fellowship, Paul also speaks about character and suffering. We have all suffered. Some of us have suffered in such a way that our wounds are still open and oozing. Others bear scars of wounds since healed. Some people in the world suffer horrors that we can't even imagine, and that could never be captured by Hollywood producers. How can we reconcile sitting at the table of love with such suffering in the world and in our own lives? We are often told to look to Jesus, who suffered on the cross, even though his physical suffering wasn't even as close to some of the physical tortures that others experience. But he *was* left alone on that cross, his Father turned his face away. And because of that, he has experienced the worst suffering possible. This is why we look to Jesus. Because he's been there. In Jesus' earthly ministry, sometimes he healed the sick and the lame, and sometimes he restored families and others to community. But he also came alongside others and suffered with them. He suffered alongside Mary and Martha as they lost their brother Lazarus. And he sent his Holy Spirit to be the great comforter – the one who would continue to walk alongside us as we suffer.

And this **suffering supposedly produces endurance**. I think we've all asked at some point or another – “why do I have to go through this – isn't there an easier way?” Well, I think that as we go through hardship, we really do learn to stick with the program – to run the race before us. Because if we get through each trial, then we have learned something, and we have grown stronger, and we will be better able to face the next trial when it comes along. The reality is, you don't build endurance by lifting a few weights – you build it by running hard and often and long.

**Endurance produces character**. So much of our penal system, as well as our parenting and education focuses on behaviour – do this, don't do that. How can we get others to behave as we would like or as is appropriate in our society? But I think behaviour arises out of character. Perhaps we should instead be thinking of inner transformation, so that our outer behavior reflects our inner character.

Most of us know how to behave in such a way that we get along all right in society. But that doesn't necessarily make us good people. None of our behaviour makes us worthy of the gospel of Christ. But if the Holy Spirit has been poured out into our hearts, and we are changed from the inside, we are given a new heart and a new spirit. And this new heart and spirit gives us a sense of who we are in Christ and who we belong to. And as we participate more fully and deeply in the life of God, we find that we are transformed more and more into his image – our character will become like that of Christ – self-sacrificing, marked by unconditional love (which means no ulterior motives or agendas), and a genuine desire to be God's body in the world to bring healing and wholeness and peace to all. That's what integrity is all about.

Finally, **a hope that does not disappoint**. Simply put, how could we possibly be disappointed by the joyous expectation that God will continue to be God, that he will continue to claim his people for his own, and that he will continue to uphold his promises? And since we have been invited to the table of God's life and love, the hope that does not disappoint has already been realized – and we are not disappointed.

Look again to Rublev's icon. Think a little again about the open space in front of the chalice – in front of the slain lamb. Think again about the invitation to join the table, the communion of love between Father, Son, and Spirit. Think again about how God both sends us out in to the world as his body, but also invites us in to his body. Father, Son, Spirit. Gathered around a table of communion and sacrifice. Faith, peace, grace, and love, hope in suffering, a transformed character to bear more perfectly the image of Christ. And an empty seat in front of the chalice of the lamb who was slain. Will you sit down to the table with God? And if you do, what will happen? What are the consequences of dining with God (and on Christ)? Love, reconciliation, restoration, holy communion, suffering, endurance, character, and hope – realized and fulfilled. Pretty good party.