

A sermon preached by the Revd RL Ficks III at Church of the Good Shepherd, Houlton, Maine on Trinity Sunday (6/16), 2019

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

On this particular day of the year, we do something we do on no other. Instead of marking an event in the life of Jesus of Nazareth or an occasion in the life of the Church, we mark a doctrine...namely, the doctrine of how the Church comes to know God...the forms this knowing takes...specifically as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...as a Trinity

Now, don't get away from me yet...away into that land my college fellows used to refer to...a place reached when a particular lecture had become so incredibly dull that they suggested that they were being transported to Megoland...MEGO...as in, my eyes glaze over.

Doctrines can, admittedly, be...well...doctrinaire...and horridly dull. If you will bear with me, perhaps two teachers of far greater brain and skill in communicating than I could make these next few moments edifying and pleasant rather than...dull.

The first gentleman is Charles Williams...an editor during the last century at Oxford House (later to become Oxford University Press)...and a man of stunning brain and wit.

Charles became embroiled in a most bitter dispute that occupied the London papers for some considerable time in the late 1930's. The dispute had a name...the Rhinoceros Controversy. Its basis was a heated and quite vituperative debate regarding the plural of rhinoceros. It had come up in the paper when an editorialist had mentioned something about rhinocerii. A much affronted reader wrote back that he was astounded that an editorial writer at the London Times would be so ill-informed as not to know that the plural of rhinoceros was rhinoceron. This led to considerable back and forth for some days. Rather than any resolution being reached, a third party weighed in and wrote that she was speechless at such silliness. After all, he wrote, anyone knows that, in England and in proper English, the logical plural of rhinoceros was rhinoceroses.

Finally, Charles Williams was brought into the fray by the Editor of the Editorial page. The Editor called Williams...explained the situation...and asked Williams, "Which is correct?" Williams pondered a bit and replied, "Well, they all are." The Editor was not placated and insisted, "No, that won't do. Which one is the right one?" Not to be brow-beaten by even so august a personage as the Editorial page Editor, Williams replied, "Each is. Each is simply another manner of saying the same thing. None is more correct than the other...just different."

So we, today, have held before us the fact that God is known in not one manner, but in three. As Father...as Son...and as Holy Spirit.

As the creative force upon which all strength and life depends...that which was before time and is through time and will be beyond time...the consciousness that willed into being all that is both seen and unseen.

As a man who walked the earth as we...at a particular time and in a particular place and whose life is accessible to us and worthy, as best we are able, of our emulation...whose footsteps we have promised...again, as best we can...to follow.

And, finally, as an enlivening spirit that makes possible and present a deepening understanding of the power of God to guide, to comfort, and to cheer...across eternity and across the 2000 years that separate us from the, birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

Lest I stray too far into my own endeavor to explain this doctrine and draw us from Charles's glorious insights and into Megoland...I would note the wisdom of the second gentleman to whom I earlier referred...this time, a man who became a great friend of mine over the years and whom I hold in highest esteem, the Walter H Gray Professor of Anglican Theology at Yale Divinity School, Rowan Greer.

In a most memorable sermon on the subject of the Trinity, Father Greer noted that the Trinity was sort of like Pooh Bear and Piglet searching for the Woozel. According to AA Milne, one day, Pooh and Piglet set out to catch a Woozel. Properly armed with pop guns, they began to circle a large pine tree. It had snowed a bit during the preceding night and, sure enough, when they reached the end of their first circling of the tree, there were a set of tracks...the four footprints of what certainly must be a Woozel. Courageously they continued on, and upon completing a second circumnavigation of the tree discovered yet another set of Woozel tracks. Of course, the third trip produced the same results...and, in his inimitable manner, Father Greer has made rather clear the notion of one thing producing three very different sets of tracks.

Well, the doctrine of the Trinity has, in fact, been clarified by two rather remarkable intellects, and for that, we might be grateful. We might also be grateful that this force we know by the word God deigns to be revealed in a richness of variety that leaves possible to each of us an endless engagement in myriad manners and moments of our journeys...an endless possibility to know the source and bedrock of meaning in our journeys...to touch and be touched...and, on this day, to give thanks.