

Chording Along – Romans 8:9-17

Trinity: the principal description of God for Christians. Some have even argued that it is the Christian *name* for God. But for something so foundational, it's oh so difficult to understand!

I think most Christians just let the words that talk about God being “Three in One” just slip on past, because they are just so hard to wrap one's mind around.

That's not necessarily bad! Goodness knows, there is so much we don't and can't understand about the workings of God; faith is about not just believing them, but being able to believe them without fully knowing how they work. Like your TV or your phone...

But the Trinity, while doctrinally difficult, has a very practical side: it teaches us about perfect community, and how God uses humanity and our relationships with each other and God to work out God's purpose.

In God exist some exquisitely beautiful things that our simple human words just can't express well – especially since the words we use reflect our human relationships and all their imperfections. Much like the family language Scripture and we use that I talked about a couple of weeks ago: things are complicated.

Some people, perhaps you, have real trouble with parental and family language used to express qualities of God, because they have known parents and family to be imperfect, even abusive. And rather than seeing glimpses of God's perfection mirrored in life (the positive), they are repelled by what they see when they project their own painful human relationships on God, because of the language we use.

But it's the best we have.

So, what about the Trinity? Paul's passage today written to the Romans hits this squarely: this is about community.

Trinity describes God, in three persons (that's the theological language! Persons. Just doesn't seem adequate, but there it is). God, in three persons: Father, Son, Spirit or Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer or however you formulate it. Jesus prays in the Gospel of John that his followers "may be one as you, Father, and I are one" – one, but different, but the same. Whew.

So, before I lose you completely (if I haven't already), here's what I'm trying to get across this morning: in the Trinity, however awkward the words we use, God is modeling for us a kind of perfect community. But what's *really* cool is that once you a glimpse of that perfect community, you can also see us: God is using our human imperfection alongside God's perfection to make something even more beautiful, something that draws creation into God's future.

To try and help you catch that glimpse, we're going to have a music lesson! Of sorts. And you all get to sing along.

So, you over here on the left, here's a note I'd like you to sing. Try it... good. Now, next section, here's your note. That note is a major third above the first note. Third section: this one is a perfect fifth above the first, a minor third above the second: great! And all the way over on the right... same as the first.

Okay, let's do it again. This time, as I give you your note, hold it. Go ahead and breathe as you need to, but come back in so that we sustain the sound until I stop you.

Do you hear what we've got? We have a chord!

Now there are lots of ways of trying to describe the Trinity. One of the most popular has used the sun. The sun itself symbolizes God, the light coming from the sun Christ, and the warmth of the sun the Holy Spirit. That works pretty well, but if you push it, you can find yourself in heresies they used to burn people over. Any metaphor is going to have its limitations, and some are better than others.

Which is why I like this musical illustration – today, with you, a living musical illustration.

To recap, the Trinity is the perfect model of community: literally, three in one, working like the motto of the Three Musketeers: “One for all and all for one!” The three “persons” are distinct, but inseparable.

That’s a good way to describe perfect community. Ever been so close to someone that you think each other’s thoughts? And with this chord you just sang, the three notes become one sound – distinct pitches, one sound, all in harmony together.

But all this is just a simple illustration unless it has some practical point. This is where we inject humanity into the mix, where we learn our place in God’s music.

God created us, and created us to be in community and communion with God – in harmony, like this chord.

But in our brokenness, our sin, our un-God-liness, we don’t fit in that harmony. The choir’s going to join us now. So, our chord – just three notes for now:

Now the choir: Joel? Choir? A major seventh!

Ok. That is still harmony, but it’s not the same, is it? Kinda anxious. That dissonance in our chord represents what fallen humanity brings to the divine community – the *fourth* note that pulls everything funny. (In fact, in music theory, which is what we call the technical part of music – cool that theory and theology have the same first four letters

– in music theory, the discord in this chord is caused by a musical interval called an augmented fourth!)

Now, music uses chords like this in order to set a mood, but especially to move the music forward. That chord we just made was dying to resolve into this: Joel? Roll it back and forth a couple of times. Hear the pull?

Here's a famous example of how dissonance in harmony can both set a mood and pull music forward, and I will give two free tickets to a concert here this Fall to anyone who can tell me where this passage comes from after the service: Joel? (Tristan). Do you feel how it moves, how it just begs to move into resolution?

Well, the chord that is the community that is God put together with humanity *is* dissonant. But that is also how God makes the beautiful music of his purpose move along toward resolution: each of the notes holding its assigned place: God the Father/Creator the root of the chord, the bottom note; Christ as the third, major/minor; the Holy Spirit, note three, the perfect fifth - plus the tension of humanity, the note that fits but not quite, all awaiting final resolution in the Kingdom of God.

We are not just a community here in this building, or including those who aren't here but who are our fellow-parishioners; we are community with all the saints and all humanity, in relationship with God the three in one, moving – chording - our way toward God's beautiful

cadence. As Paul said in our lesson, we have been brought by Christ into the community, the family of God. Not to live selfish lives, but to be led by the Spirit into life in Christ, with Christ, with God in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Made to seek out and be community, not just with God, but with all humankind – making God’s music of the universe.