

The Illogical Essence of Being

Preached in the FCCW Virtual Worship Service of June 7, 2020

John 1:1-5, 10-14, 18 and Genesis 1:26-31

There are certain days on the Church calendar that present preachers with the daunting challenge of having something to say about a well known passage that the congregation has not already heard many times before.

These are the days like Christmas, Easter and Pentecost.

Then there are days like Trinity Sunday, where the challenge is not so much to say something fresh and new as it is to simply say anything relevant to people's real-life joys and struggles.

The trouble with the Trinity is that it describes a paradox, and paradoxes are inherently unsolvable and notoriously impractical.

They might stimulate our intellectual imagination for a time.

But sooner or later they just exhaust our brains until we give up making sense of them.

Jourdain's Paradox is a classic example of the sort of logical nightmare that gets my brain going round and around in circles like a dog chasing its own tail.

Jourdain's Paradox supposes a card, like a business card, with a written statement on both sides.

The front of the card states: The statement on the other side of this card is TRUE.

The back of the card states: The statement on the other side of this card is FALSE.

If both statements are true it creates a paradox.

If the statement on the front of the card is true, then so is the one on the back of the card.

But if the statement on the back of the card is true, then the statement on the front of the card is false.

It then follows that if the first statement is true, then the first statement is false.

If the first statement is false, then the second is false, too.

But if the second statement is false, then the first statement is true.

It then follows that if the first statement is false, then the first statement is true.

Jourdain's Paradox creates a logic trap from which there is no escape.

Another logical paradox, named the Omnipotence Paradox, has been used to disprove the existence of an all-powerful God.

The Omnipotence Paradox is expressed in the question: "Can a God create a stone so heavy that God cannot lift it?"

This question generates a dilemma.

God can either create a stone God cannot lift, or God cannot create a stone that God cannot lift.

If God can create a stone that God cannot lift, then God is not omnipotent because there is a weight threshold beyond God's own power to lift.

If God cannot create a stone God cannot lift, then there is something God cannot create, and therefore God is not omnipotent.

In either case, there can be no such thing as an omnipotent God.

Christianity is distinctive among religions in that Christians adhere to a paradox called the Trinity to describe the nature of God.

At the heart of our faith is the claim that there is only One true God—and that this God is made up of three distinct persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Like Jourdain's Paradox, the Omnipotence Paradox, and every other paradox known to humankind, the paradox of the Trinity contains two claims that cannot logically both be true.

By the way, Unitarianism emerged partially as a rejection of the Doctrine of the Trinity on the grounds that it was "irrational."

I couldn't agree more.

What all paradoxes—especially the paradox of the Trinity—tell us in the end is that there are mysteries that cannot be deciphered by minds equipped solely with human logic.

Personally, if the mystery of the Trinity could be rendered understandable through proofs supported by mortal reason, I would have some lingering doubts about its divine authenticity.

As the great Christian thinker Augustine put it: "What wonder is it that you do not understand? If you do understand, then it is not God. ..."

And, so I have no sense of urgency concerning a fathomable explanation of the Trinity.

If and when it comes, my guess is that it will come not through logical deduction but through divine revelation.

That does not mean however, that the Trinity is irrelevant to real life here and now.

In the reading from Genesis it says that when God created the human race, we were created in God's image.

If the Trinity is an accurate depiction of God's nature then one thing we can say with certainty is that the essence of God's being is relationship.

The Doctrine of the Trinity reveals God to be a community of three, unified in an eternal relationship to one another.

If the bonds of love between God the Creator, Jesus the flesh and blood incarnation of God and the Holy Spirit, the creative energy of God best define who God is;
And if you and I are created in the image and likeness of this God,
Then we are created to be in loving relationship to God and to one another.

The essence of our being is to fulfill what Jesus taught us to regard as the two greatest commandments: Love God with all our being, and love others as we love ourselves.

If the details involved in keeping those commandments seem to steer us toward illogical actions—like forgiving, sharing, resisting and sacrificing—the Trinity reminds us that faithfulness does not come down to willpower or virtue, but to being true to our truest self;
the self that is created in the image of the Triune God.

And isn't that the greatest paradox of all?
That a people who are created in the image of God and honored with dominion over a world that God declared to be "very good" upon its creation,
are immersed in a Creation drowning in the present evils of racism and despotism, toxic nationalism and destructive materialism,
and a whole host of isms that do not reflect God's original intention for Creation.
Or God's intention for us.

Because the truth is before there is to be change without, it must begin with change within for those who call themselves disciples of Jesus.
We have to honestly examine our part in the way things are.
Whether our part has been action or inaction.

And yet, we have this hope.
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not—and does not—overcome that light.

What the Trinity teaches us is that, though no one has ever seen God, it is Jesus who has made God known to us.

Who demonstrates indisputably who God is and who God is not.

And it is the wisdom beyond human knowledge that we receive from the Holy Spirit that allows us to see in the dark that surrounds us and inhabits us.

To see, and to be, what it means to be created in the image of the Trinity. Because as illogical as it may sound, that is who we are.