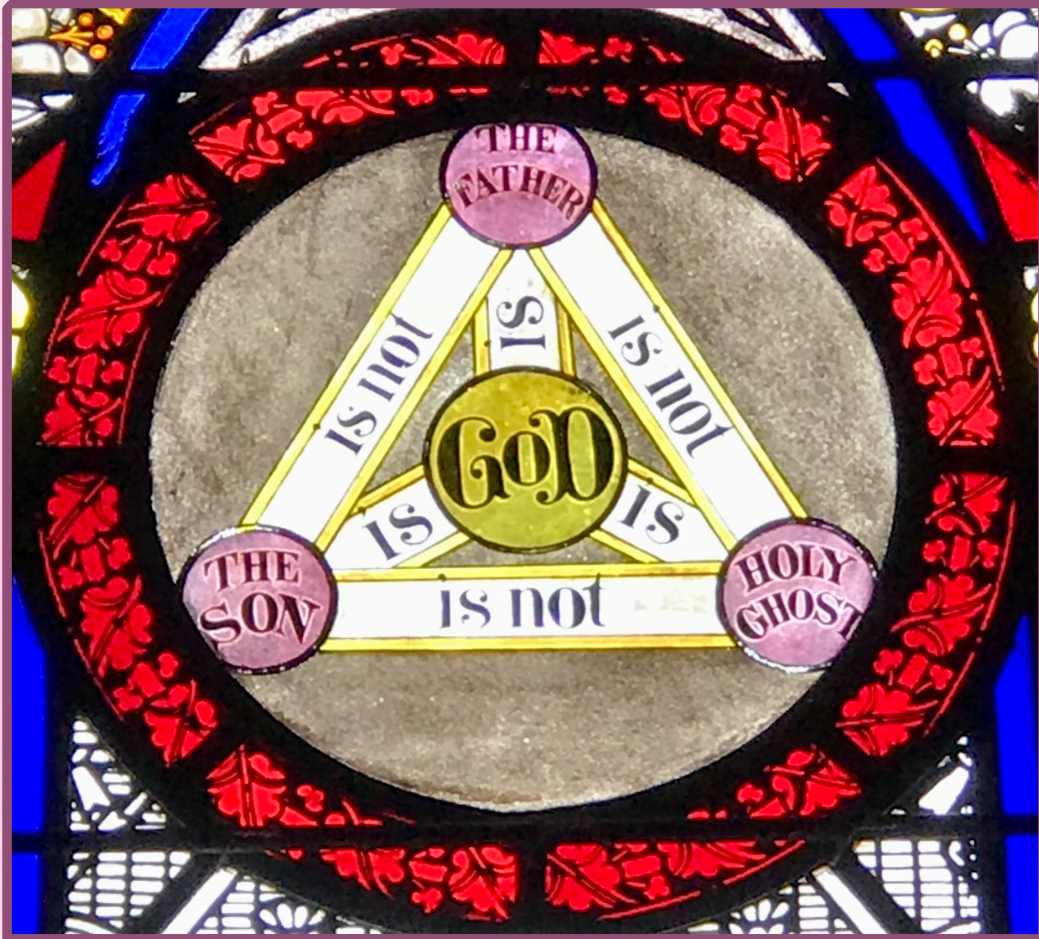


REFLECTIONS



TRINITY SUNDAY

REVELATIONS. 3:6

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

APOCALYPSE

by
Norm Wright

We are living in an apocalyptic age. No, I'm not talking about the end of the world or fire and brimstone raining down from heaven. The word apocalypse comes from a Greek word meaning to uncover; pulling the curtain back to reveal the truth. In an apocalyptic age we encounter truths that will make us feel uncomfortable and there are a lot of uncomfortable truths we are dealing in today's world, but I'm not going to delve into them.

Rather on this Trinity Sunday, I want to pull back the curtain on the doctrine of the Trinity itself; specifically, the concept of a triune god as expressed in our creeds and doxologies.

God being understood as our Father, Jesus as God's Son (our brother), and God as Spirit are not in question here, such referential terms are found throughout the New Testament, but the concept of three distinct persons in one god is not found in our scriptures.

I'm not going to try to explain the complex, meandering theology behind the doctrine of a triune god, but rather talk about the events that led to it and the creeds that express it.

Our church's eclectic collection of stained glass windows will aid us, as we have two windows that have a connection going back to the Roman Empire and the emperor, Constantine. The two windows I'm referring to is the DeMolay window in the back of the nave on the south side and the Trinity window located on the east wall of the South Transept.

Starting with the DeMolay window, we find an inscription attributed to Constantine, "*In hoc signo vinces.*" "In this sign you will conquer".

In the year 312, Constantine was at war with his rival for the imperial throne of the Rome, Maxentius. On the eve of battle, legend has it that Constantine had a vision or a dream in which he saw within the blinding light of the Sun a cross and heard the words, "In this sign you will conquer." Perhaps his "vision" was more a stroke of genius than the anything else.

By the 4th century, Christianity had spread throughout the Roman Empire including the ranks of the Roman legions. There are stories about Christians in those legions who refused to fight an opposing army if there were Christians in it. I suspect Constantine took advantage of this knowledge to consolidate the large number of Christians in his ranks and to weaken the resolve of any Christians in Maxentius's ranks by placing a cross on his legions' shields, and a Chi-Rho on his banners. Constantine wins the day, legalizes Christianity, and with legalization came imperial patronage (money).

The other window in our church connected to Constantine is the Trinity window which contains a quote from the Athanasian Creed as seen on on the front of today's bulletin.

Within thirteen years of Constantine legalizing and patronizing Christianity, violent disputes between various bishop and their communities broke out over the nature of Jesus and who was or wasn't a true Christian, threatening Pax Romana. In 325 Constantine ordered these quarrelsome bishops to attend the first church council at his palace on the island of Nicea to settle their difference. The result is our Nicene Creed.

What we don't talk about is the bloodshed and mayhem that ensued after believing the creeds became the criteria for being a Christian and after Christianity becomes the only religion of the Roman Empire in 381; how the once persecuted Christians became the persecutors, exiling and even executing heretical Christians, among others for their opposition to the creeds.

We are living in an apocalyptic age. In 1946 in a place called Nag Hammadi, Egypt, two brothers came across clay jars containing a number of leather-bound codices. Archeologist were able to identify these codices as writings of the early church, some that Athanasius had ordered to be burned in 367. Included in these codices were some unknown gospels, The Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, and much, much more that are giving us a window into early Christianity.

Since that and other discoveries about the Church have emerged, almost every mainline Christian leader today have come to a realization, the Church needs to change. Bishop Folts echoed that realization when he met with the Vestry and Search Committee on Palm Sunday.

What does that mean? Where do we begin?

Prompting the need for change is the vast numbers of people who have left and are leaving the Church, and when that happens the Spirit of God is telling us something. Of course, no one has given us any definitive answers as to what change means or where to begin, but I think our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry, is on to something with his emphasis on following the way of love, on following the teachings of Jesus.

Love is a word that is manifestly missing from our creeds and its absence reveals a blatant neglect for what Jesus taught.

In the Book of Revelation, the Book of Apocalypse, its author John has a vision of Jesus addressing seven churches. At the end of Jesus' revealing message to each church, Jesus says, "*Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.*"

In this apocalyptic age, God's Spirit is speaking to us through discoveries like Nag Hammadi and through discoveries in the fields of science, history, and other disciplines. While they take to task some of the Church's long held doctrines about the world and about Jesus, they don't challenge the teachings of Jesus and God's love.

In this apocalyptic age, God's Spirit is on the move, helping us to understand ourselves by pulling back the curtain on the world of our making and helping us to understand who we are and whose we are.

In this apocalyptic age, we need to wake up and listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

HYMN

(TH 1982 # 379)

***God is Love, let heaven adore him; God is love, let earth rejoice;
let creation sing before him and exalt him with one voice.***

***God who laid the earth's foundation, God who spread the heavens above.
God who breathes through all creation: God is love, eternal love.***

(Timothy Rees 1874-1939)

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