

The Green Hill Presbyterian Church
Sunday, May 31, 2026 – Table Copy

SILENT PREPARATION:

Christianity stands or falls by this proclamation of the closeness of God who is Triune Love. There have been of course many alternatives throughout history, many alternatives to this gospel of love. One would be to turn God into pure transcendence, a being with no connection to or interest in history or the world. But Christians proclaim the Father. Not a stern Victorian parent, but the One who knows and even cares for the sparrows, the One portrayed in the parable of the prodigal son as rushing toward his child and embracing him, the One Jesus tells us is perfect. — Timothy J. Calvert, O.P.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Today – on our worship calendar – is Trinity Sunday.

The self-revelation – by a Deity –

is unique to the Judeo-Christian religious experience.

Trinity Sunday – then – recognizes that Our God has chosen to self-reveal as one God, but who is present to us in three, distinct, Persons.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (*Unison*)

Triune God, known to us in more ways than we can count, we marvel at the mysteries of life; we are amazed by your attention to our lives. As we ponder the vast expanse of space, we are fascinated by the great distances, too extensive to understand. And, the times of our lives are but a tiny ripple in your eternity. Yet, you have honored this planet by revealing yourself to us – in the life and ministry of Jesus, and through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Grant us a fresh experience of your presence – and your love – in this time of worship. Amen.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Great God of all creation, in whom we live, and move, and have our being;
and whose attention was focused on us in the life, death,
and resurrection of Jesus Christ;
and whose gift of the Holy Spirit has empowered and sustained
Christ's disciples for almost two thousand years:

Speak to us now through your Word, that we might be united in mutual caring,
and that our witness to the world may reflect
the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
your everlasting love for all humankind,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

FIRST SCRIPTURE READING

II Corinthians 13:11-13

Paul has written two – rather long – letters to the Church at Corinth.

Our reading contains Paul's final words – as he closes his second letter....

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell.

Be restored; listen to my appeal; agree with one another; live in peace;
and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

SECOND SCRIPTURE READING

Matthew 28:16-20

As Matthew closes his Gospel,

he reports the words of Jesus' Great Commission to his disciples....

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee,
to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

When they saw him, they worshiped him, but they doubted.

And Jesus came and said to them,

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit,

and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

5/21/24

SERMON

"No Time for Knapsacks!"

Pastor

Some years ago, a silly story made the rounds.

You may well have heard it,
but – on the other hand – you may have missed its spiritual application...

The story is about a pilot, and his three passengers:
a boy scout, a priest, and an atomic scientist.

The plane develops engine trouble in mid-flight,
and the **pilot** rushes back to the passenger compartment.

He then exclaims,
*"The plane is going down!
We only have three parachutes,
and there are four of us!"*

Then – the **pilot** adds –
"I have a family waiting for me at home. I must survive!"

And – with that – he grabs one of the parachutes, and jumps out of the plane.

At this point, the **atomic scientist** jumps to his feet.

And – he declares – *"I am the smartest man in the world.
It would be a great tragedy if my life was snuffed out!"*

He then grabs a parachute – and exits the plane.

With an alarmed look on his face, the **priest** turns to the **Boy Scout**,
*"My son, I have no family.
I am ready to meet my Maker.
You are still young – with much ahead of you.
You take the last parachute."*

But – at this point – the **Boy Scout** interrupts the priest,
“*Relax, Father. Don’t say any more. We will be all right.*”

The priest – then – asks,
“*How in the world can you say that we are all right?*”

The **Boy Scout** replies,
“*The reason we’re all right is that the world’s smartest man
just jumped out of the plane wearing my knapsack!*”

That is story is silly, but – nevertheless –
there is an *important lesson* to be derived from it:

Metaphorically speaking,
there are many smart people today –
many successful people, many affluent people –
who are jumping out of airplanes;
but they are *wearing knapsacks* – instead of parachutes.

That is, they are reaching for ideas – and philosophies –
that *may seem* very appealing.

But – nevertheless – those ideas and philosophies *will not* save them:
They are knapsacks, *not parachutes*.

In other words, people today need something they can believe in –
but many of them are looking in the wrong places.

For example, **Buckminster Fuller** once said,
“*The universe is a locked safe,
with the combination on the inside.*”

Now – to be sure, **Buckminster Fuller** was *an amazing man*.

But – at least this once –
this brilliant **Englishman** was *dead wrong*:

That is, the universe *is not* a locked safe – with the combination inside.

Rather, there is *abundant meaning* – and *purpose* – for this world.

And, that meaning and purpose *is readily available* to those who seek it.

There is available to us – and to everyone else –
a body of truth that is *knowable, understandable, and eternal*.

Indeed – many centuries ago – when the early church *summed up* this truth –
they did so in the doctrine we know as **the Trinity**:

God, the Father; God, the Son; God, the Holy Spirit....

And – along the way –
the church saw fit to dedicate a particular **Sunday** –
the **Sunday** after **Pentecost** –
to celebrate the significance –
and explore the implications –
of the **Doctrine of the Trinity**.

To begin, a bit of history....

The fact is that we *will not* find the word “**Trinity**” in the **Bible**.

Nor is it found in the writings of the early church fathers –
that is, not until the *third century after Christ’s resurrection*.

By that time, the concept of the **Trinity** had grown out of
extensive theological reflection on the texts of the **Scriptures**.

Indeed, the **early Church** discovered that the **Doctrine of the Trinity**
met their deepest needs –
in terms of understanding *who God* is,
and *what a relationship* with **God** is all about.

And so – today – we will explore this great truth together.

We begin with **“God the Father Almighty – Maker of heaven and earth.”**

God the Father: omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, everlasting....

This is the **God** who spoke – and the world was created. (Genesis 1:5ff)

This is the **God** who guides the stars,
who rules the heavens,
who orders the planets in their orbits.

This is the **God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob** –
as well as of **Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.**

This is **God** in transcendent authority;
Lawgiver and Judge;
the **God** whose ways are not our ways,
the **God** whose thoughts are not our thoughts,
the **God** whose glory *“the heavens are telling....”*

But – while we all believe in this **God** –
for many, this **God of transcendence** seems far removed.

That is, unapproachable, and – perhaps even –
out of touch with our needs.

The latter perception brings to mind a true story –
one that is told about **Sir David Edgeworth** –
an **Australian** geologist, and explorer.

At the turn of the twentieth century,
Edgeworth accompanied **Ernest Shackleton**,
on his expedition to the **South Pole** –
one of the *most famous expeditions* ever undertaken.

During this **South Pole** expedition,
Edgeworth’s assistant – Douglas Mawson –
was working in his tent one day.

Then – suddenly –
the quietness was broken by a muffled cry from outside:
“*Are you very busy?*” called this voice.

Mawson recognized as the voice as that of Sir Edgeworth.
“*Yes I am,*” Mawson replied. “*What’s the matter?*”

“*Are you really very busy?*” asked the voice once again.

“*Yes,*” snapped Mawson – begining to lose his patience – “*What is it you want?*”

After a moment’s silence, Sir David Edgeworth replied – *almost apologetically* –
“*Well, I’m down [in] a crevasse,
and I don’t think I can hang on much longer.*”

Mawson – then – found – and rescued – Edgeworth – from near death.

Here is the point of interest:

Can you imagine a well-known geologist and explorer,
who had fallen into a large crack in the **Antarctic ice**,
and whose life was in peril.

Yet, he was so shy that he was *reluctant to let his colleague know* of his situation!

“*Are you really very busy?*” – he had asked –
as he *dangled there* – in mortal danger!

In the same way – *if all we knew* about **God**
was this transcendent **Lawgiver and Judge** –
we might also be timid about seeking Him out.

That is, just how do we approach a **Being** who is omnipotent, omniscient,
omnipresent, everlasting?

Indeed, how can we even begin to imagine
a **Being** who is beyond space and time,
the **Creator** of everything that exists?

The fact is that our tiny, mortal, brains *cannot even begin to cope* with such a One.

And such a **God** may well *seem far off* – and *out of touch* with our situation.

This – then – is why **God the Father**
revealed His true nature by coming to us as a gentle, compassionate man:
Jesus of Nazareth.

In **Jesus**, we see **God the Son** – cradling young children in his arms,
and treating all persons with dignity, and respect.

In **Jesus, the Son**, we see the *approachable side* of **God** –
a **God** who *would lay down* his own life,
on behalf of the creatures He had formed out –
of the dust of the earth.

Without **Jesus**, we would *never have known* what **God** was really like.

And – **Jesus** told us – to call **God the Father**, “Abba,” “*Daddy.*”

Jesus – then – both *taught us* about **God’s love**,
and *showed us* **God’s grace.**

In the **mid-1950s**, the **Christian world** was shocked --
when five missionaries in **Ecuador** –
were slaughtered by a tribe of **Auca Indians.**

Sometime later -- by the **grace of God** – this same **Auca tribe**
welcomed the wife of one of the martyred missionaries –
and the sister of another missionary –
into their community.

It was an *amazing reversal of attitude* on the part of the **Aucas.**

And, it allowed missionaries to *begin translating* the **New Testament**
into the **language of the Aucas.**

But – as we might imagine – *there were* difficulties.

For example, the translators had difficulty
putting the word “*reconciled*” into the **Auca language**.

One of the most important verses in the **New Testament** is **II Corinthians 5:18**:
“*All this is from God,
who reconciled us to himself through Christ.*”

“*Reconciliation*” – of course –
is a *critical word* for understanding the **Christian faith**.

And so, the missionaries searched diligently –
for an equivalent word in the **Auca language** –
but *found none*.

Then – one day – a translator was traveling through the jungle –
with some of the **Aucas**.

They came to a *narrow, deep ravine*,
and the missionary thought they could go no farther.

The **Aucas** – however – took out their machetes,
and cut down a large tree –
so that it fell over the ravine –
permitting them all to cross safely.

The translator – listening intently to the **Aucas** –
then discovered that they had a word for “*a tree across the ravine.*”

And this – then – became the word for the meaning of “*reconciliation*”:
Jesus was “*the tree laid across the chasm*” –
bridging the gap that separated humanity from **God!**

Indeed, **Christ** is *our bridge* to **God** – and to *our salvation*.

And so – while we are grateful for **God the Father**,
in all of His *power and glory* –
we are also grateful for **God the Son**,
in all his *gentleness and grace*.

Jesus allows us to approach God with confidence.

And – because of **Christ** –
we know that **God** loves us,
even more than our own parents are able to love us.

But, there is *even more good news* about the **Trinity**:

There is a *third person* in the **Trinity** –
who is *just as important* as the first two:

And that is the **God the Holy Spirit**.

The **Holy Spirit** is the *personal presence* of **God** in our daily lives.

The **Holy Spirit** is the *inner witness* of the **reality of God**.

The **Spirit of God** is the *confirming testimony*
that the **God** who created us is with us still.

Indeed – according to **I John Chapter 4** – our life in the world
is actually **Christ's life** lived within us,
through the indwelling **Holy Spirit**.

And, so it is that **Oswald Chambers** explains that the –
often quite difficult –
commands of Jesus *are not*
given to us as *mere human beings*.

But – *rather* – these commands *are* given to the **Holy Spirit** –
to the **presence and power of Christ** – that *indwells us!*

Indeed, the *reality of our human need* for this power
becomes quite clear in our reading from **Matthew's Gospel**:

Here, **Jesus** gives what we know as the **Great Commission**;
but it is doubtful that we appreciate its *extraordinary implications*:

The first difficult task:

Jesus told them to “*go and make disciples of all nations...*”

To be sure, the world of the disciples
was *smaller* than the world as we know it.

But – on the other hand –
they were limited by first-century modes of travel, and communication.

So – even restricting their world to the geography they did know about –
making disciples *of all nations* must have sounded like a daunting task.

And – beyond the sheer dimensions of the mission –
a latent *distrust of foreigners* was a huge problem.

Furthermore, the disciples were – of course – all **Jewish**.

And the people of the nations – *ha goyim* – were *unclean*,
that is, people *to be avoided* – *not evangelized!*

Nor were the disciples either *well-traveled*, or *learned men*.

Indeed – *even today* – many of us *have difficulty*
relating across cultural – and racial – lines.

And – what's more – the disciples had *no power base* on which to draw:

Pentecost had *not yet* happened,
nor had **Peter** had his vision of the sheet lowered from heaven –
the vision that revealed to him
that *no one was unclean* in the **sight of God!**

And – yet – **Jesus** says to these *most unlikely* of candidates:
“*Go turn the world upside down.*”

It must truly have sounded like “*Mission: Impossible!*”

The second very difficult task: Jesus told the disciples that –
once they got moving on that first task –
they were to *baptize the people* of those nations!

Baptism – of course – was *not the first step* in making new disciples.

Rather, baptism only *took place after* a person had been evangelized –
and had been persuaded – *by the gospel message* –
to embrace **Christ as Savior and Lord!**

And – so – what **Jesus** was telling the eleven to do was huge.

He was telling them to *share the gospel with strangers*,
to *publicly identify themselves* as followers of someone
who had just been officially *declared an outlaw*, and *executed*.

In short, they were to *give personal witness* to their faith –
and we all *know how difficult* that is!

And, the third very difficult task: Jesus *told them to teach* these new converts
everything he had commanded them – the eleven – to obey.

That, too, must have *sounded like mission impossible*.

Even assuming *a few of them* had the gift of teaching,
where was the curriculum?

The **gospels** *had not* yet been written.

The **apostle Paul** –
whose letters would eventually become much of the **New Testament** –
had yet to be converted.

The **church** had *not yet been formed*;
doctrines had *not even begun* to be formulated;
and the **creeds** were still a couple hundred years – or more –
in the future.

What *they did have* was the scrolls of the **Hebrew Bible** – our **Old Testament** –
and *their memories* of what **Jesus** had said – and done –
while he was with them.

So – *given these realities* –
all that the eleven were ultimately able to do – then –
was the *amazing work* of the **Holy Spirit**.

And – *today* – that same **Holy Spirit** is the *divine presence* in our lives,
the *supernatural power* that enables us:
to get our lives together,
to achieve spiritual discipline, and direction,
to take charge of our lives,
and to channel them in ways that both glorify God,
and enrich the world.

Hopefully, the importance of the **doctrine of the Trinity** is now obvious:

God the Father – our **Creator** –
is the **Source** of all that is, or was, or ever will be.

God the Son – our **Savior and Redeemer** –
is the One who *gave his life* for us,
that we might *know how much God* loves us.

And **God the Holy Spirit** – the *evidence* of the **indwelling Christ** –
enables and empowers us to *live our lives victoriously*
in all of life's daily crises.

This – then – is the *meaning and significance* of the **Trinity**.

So, *why settle for a knapsack* instead of a parachute?

Indeed, *why settle for a parachute* when there is a **Paraclete**?

[**Paraclete** is *another word* used to describe the **Holy Spirit** –
it means **One** who *comes along side* –
and then indwells, and accompanies us, throughout all of life!]

A **parachute** gently *lowers us* to the ground;
but a **Paraclete** ultimately *lifts us* to the heavens.

And *that* is the *only way* to go!

But – to *achieve such a unity* of mind and heart –
requires a surrender –
of all that we are, and all that we hope to be –
to the **presence and power of God**.

And – the *unfortunate truth* is –
that many people want *only a partial experience* of **God's Spirit**;
that is, *without* total surrender.

A letter was once mailed to **General Electric**;
it was sent by a *little girl in the third grade* –
who had *chosen to investigate electricity* for her class project.

"I'm trying to get all the information on electricity I can," her letter said,
"so please send me any booklets and papers you have.

*"Also, would it be asking too much for you
to send me a little sample of electricity?"*

Similarly, many want *just a little sample* of the **Spirit**.

That is, they *don't want* the **Spirit** to come in *all its fullness*.

Perhaps they fear that *their personality will be changed* –
that they *will not* then like themselves....

But – the truth is –
that they will then *actually become all* that they were created to be!

Perhaps they *are not sure* that **God** has their *best interests at heart*....

But – as the **Apostle Paul** has written –

“If God is for us, who is against us?”

*“He who did not withhold his own Son,
but gave him up for all of us,
will he not with him give us everything else?”*

A **mother and child** once stood looking at the beautiful **picture of Christ** –
standing at the door knocking.

After a moment of thought,
the mother said, *“I wonder why they don’t let him in?”*

The child considered this – and then replied –
*“The reason they don’t let him in
is that they are down in the cellar –
and they can’t hear him knocking.”*

Friends, it is **God’s gift** of the **Holy Spirit** –
promised to us by our **Lord Jesus Christ** –
that can *lift us out* of all the *cellars of life*.

Let us pray....

Come Holy Spirit, and kindle in us the fire of your love.

Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be recreated,
and you shall renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit
did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
grant that, by that same Holy Spirit,
we may be truly wise, and ever enjoy his consolations,
though Christ our Lord.

Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (*Unison*)

Adapted from the Second Helvetic Confession (1561)

Scripture has delivered to us a manifest distinction of persons, the angel saying...to the Blessed Virgin, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." And also in the baptism of Christ a voice is heard from heaven concerning Christ, "This is my beloved Son." The Holy Spirit also appeared in the form of a dove.

And when the Lord himself commanded the disciples to baptize, he commanded them to baptize "in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Elsewhere in the Gospel he said: "The Father will send the Holy Spirit in my name," and again he said: "When the Counselor comes, whom I send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me...."

Thus there are not three gods, but three persons,...co-eternal and co-equal... For according the nature or essence they are so joined together that they are one God, and the divine nature is common to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

CHARGE AND BENEDICTION

The Trinity has been described in this way:

God the Father is God *over* us....

God the Son is God *for* us....

And God the Holy Spirit is God *in* us....

One God – revealed to us in Three Persons –
all of which are experienced as Love!

Let us receive the Lord's benediction....