Several years ago, our three grandsons were baptized here, all in the same service.

And the officiating pastor used some creative wording that was somewhat different from the traditional phrasing. I noticed it, and it was fine with me.

But afterward I encountered a friend whose statements often imply questions;

“we used to baptize in the name of the Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Ghost,” was the comment.

I said, “That was the trinity…

’the God who created you,

Christ who redeems you,

and the Holy Spirit, however that was worded.’

The trinity was all there, just expressed differently.”

“Well, maybe so.” Another of those statements that still leaves a question.

Describing the Trinity always seems to leave one open-ended.

Last Sunday was Trinity Sunday, though we observed Music Sunday instead.

Trinity Sunday always follows right after Pentecost.

After we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Trinity is then complete.

In my experience in the Church of the Brethren,

Trinity Sunday is one of those more optional observances...

not as prominent as Pentecost and certainly far less than Easter.

I did speak on the Trinity last year, and explored what it means to have plurality within the Godhead.

It was a rather heavy subject.

So I was hoping to try something a bit lighter, and received the invitation again.
Of course, just defining the Trinity can somewhat boggle the mind, trying to wrap our minds around the concept of God as three persons in One.

A helpful comparison for me is with the three stages of matter:

    Very simply, water is a liquid at room temperature,

        which, when boiled, turns to steam, or vapor,

        and if you freeze it, becomes ice and turns solid.

Water, steam, ice, all the same substance, but taking different forms at different temperatures.

    I have a friend who stands by that explanation.

Another one I like is to imagine how one person can have multiple personages. Let’s take Nevin as an example, since he’s our worship leader.

    He started out life as a son and grandson,

        he was immediately a brother,

        and he grew to be known to others as a friend.

    In time, he became a husband, and eventually a father,

        relating differently in each of those roles, yet remaining the same person.

Another example of the trinity is the clover leaf: Is it one leaf or three leaves?

    Yes. We can thank none other than St. Patrick for that one.

All these attempts to explain the trinity leave us scratching our heads, so to speak. So I find it helpful the way British theologian, Donald M. Baillie, takes us through it:

    “Wasn’t it enough to have one God?,” he says,

        “Why did Christianity have to go on to say something more, and something so complicated and mysterious – that in the Unity there is a Trinity?”

Then he answers his own question:

    “It was not because God dropped down from heaven a ready-made doctrine for” us to accept.

    It was because something happened, and then something else happened.

    There were two new facts of history and experience.”

It’s that simple, really.
The first new fact, or thing that happened in the lives of biblical people, was the birth of Jesus……

and those who followed Jesus believed that God the Creator,

this great God of Abraham, Moses and the Prophets,

had now come to us in a new way…in the person of Jesus…God’s own Son.

That was the first thing that happened.

And the second thing was the experience of Pentecost.

On that momentous day, when God’s Spirit-Wind blew among them,

they remembered that in Hebrew history,

whenever such a power came into the lives of people,

it was described as the Spirit of the Lord coming upon them.

And they recalled that this was just what Jesus had promised.

Baillie says, the Trinity “tells you who God is, in God’s eternal and infinite love;

and of what God did in Jesus…

and of what God does still today, dwelling with us as truly as he dwelt among

believers twenty centuries ago…..

So to those who know the story, the doctrine of the Trinity sums up the whole Gospel.”

Now, it took leaders in the faith several centuries to sort out the various beliefs,

and to come up with the Doctrine of the Trinity.

Meanwhile, the Apostle Paul, perhaps only 25 years after the resurrection,

closed his second letter to the Corinthians with these words,

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you,” (II Cor. 13:13)

He's got the trinity, though with Christ positioned first.

But then comes the Gospel of Matthew, perhaps another 30 years later,

with Jesus saying to his disciples, appearing to them after the Resurrection,

“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.” (Matt. 28:18-20)

We call that the Great Commission.

So there it is: “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

Over two centuries before the creeds have it figured out,
Matthew is quoting Jesus using the same Trinitarian formula we use today.

Now, I think a trinity sermon – like any sermon – ought to go beyond just so much theory.

References: II Cor. 13:13, Matthew 28:18-20, John 6:24, I Cor. 14:19

And since it is appropriate to pray to any member of the Trinity – since they’re all God

We do have some choices in how we pray.

I thought we might explore how our prayer life might be enriched and enlarged
with more variety – if you will -

by addressing our prayers to any of the several members of the trinity
alternately, or as we choose, remembering, of course, that they’re all God.

That prompts the question, to Whom do you tend to pray?

Pentecostals, for example, lean more heavily on the Holy Spirit,
which would make sense for a movement that grew out of Pentecost.

Do you usually pray to God?
Do you ever just pray to Jesus? Do you have a preference?……

Think of the Godhead as a staff of specialists…three distinct persons...

And they’re all on call at any time…..and they’re all God.

I know it boggles the mind a bit to analyze it this way...but I didn’t start it.

The point is, believing in the Trinity, when you go to pray, you have a choice.

You might pray,
“Eternal God,” or “O God, Creator of all,...

Or “You Who are the God of Abraham and Moses and the Prophets,

Or, “You Who are the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”, both very biblical.

Jesus, himself, just prayed, “Father...” or “Abba Father”

some say that was a more familiar form of the name, father, comparable to our “Daddy”...

You may or may not be comfortable with that,...

After all, we’re talking here about the God who created the whole World,

Who made us in God’s own image,

and who led Biblical Folk through all those events in our Scriptures,

the God of Whom the Psalmist said, “You know my innermost thoughts.’’...

or “What are humans that Thou art mindful of us....?”

The good news is that you can pray directly to this God, referencing –if you will– all that history.

That God is our God, too.

And whether you realize it or not, many of our hymns are actually composed as prayers.

They can be read as prayers, as well as sung.

And I thought we might sing together one hymn that is a prayer to God,

to familiarize ourselves with this approach to praying.

So turn, if you will, to # 327, Great is Thy Faithfulness,

And as you sing, notice the God to whom you are praying.

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,

There is no shadow of turning with Thee

Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not

As Thou has been Thou forever wilt be.

Great is Thy Faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see;

All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

Let's read the second stanza,

(2) Summer and winter and springtime and harvest
   Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
   Join with all nature in manifold witness
   To Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

And now we sing the final stanza,

(3) Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
   Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
   Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
   Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

(Refrain)

God the Creator was worshipped since the beginning of faith.

But then, something happened: a babe was born in Bethlehem....they named him Jesus.

Angels heralded his birth,
   People flocked to see him and hear him and be healed by him,
   Demons cringed and ran from him.

The disciple Peter was the first to say, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” (Mt 16:16)

And as he was crucified, while his followers seemed in disarray,

it was the Gentile Centurian standing guard who said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!” (Mt. 27:54)

Again, it took the church centuries to sort out who Jesus was,
   very God of very God and very man of very man...

So Jesus is God, too!

   Or you may want to say, “Lord Jesus”, to honor Jesus as Lord of your life.

Christ is simply the Greek translation of the Hebrew word, Messiah.

   And since many of those who longed for the Messiah to come
Believed that Jesus, in fact, was He,

Jesus Christ became a fitting title.

The unique feature of the incarnation doctrine

Is our belief that God in fact became flesh (in Latin, “carne,” as in chili con carne)

and lived among us.

So, if you’re in pain or suffering,

Or fighting for strength against disease, or mourning the death of a loved one,

It may occur to you that here is one to Whom you can pray

Who has lived our life

and shared in a very real way the pains of our lives on earth...

and joys, too; He was a welcome guest at weddings,

(He should have been; he kept the wine flowing.)

He held children tenderly,

He wept over his friend Lazarus,

Experienced betrayal; He suffered, bled and died.

And as a member of the Holy Trinity, Jesus is God, too.

And you can pray to him

and appeal to his sense of understanding and consolation, and empathy.

Turn, if you will, to page 549 in your hymnals, with words by John Naas, an early Brethren leader,

and music by William Beery, for years a member of this church.

We'll sing stanzas 1 and 3:

“Savior of my soul, let me choose thy goal.

Self to thee I would surrender,

Choose thy cross, by thy contender,

Let me choose thy goal, Savior of my soul.

(stanza 3: ) Jesus, grant me grace so to run my race,
That I may victorious be. Thy favor show and prosper me.

So as I run my race, Jesus grant me grace.”

Now remember, according to Baillie’s account, something else happened.

It was 50 days after the resurrection….hence PENTECOST.

Many believers were gathered in Jerusalem

And God’s Spirit-wind blew among them.

Acts 2 says it sounded like the rush of a violent wind, and filled the entire house.

Tongues of flame appeared among them, and they began to speak in other languages.

But people from different countries all heard them speaking

in each one’s own language!

Some accused them of being drunk, and I love Peter’s comeback;

He said they were not drunk, not at 9 o’clock in the morning!

Peter preached a rousing sermon, that day,

And reminded the people how God had long ago promised such an outpouring of God’s Spirit

upon the people, with witnesses present from many nations.

Three thousand new believers were added on that day!

And others, day by day.

Jesus’ followers remembered how he had promised to send a “Comforter” to guide them,

sometimes also referred to as an “Advocate”, as one who defends you in court.

And the gospel of John speaks to this point;

Does anyone here remember the ditto copy machine?

It existed before photocopy machines,

And was less expensive than mimeographs…..

Often used in classrooms, with a hard-to-read purple-blue print.

And because the fluid used had spirits of alcohol, I guess,
The proper generic name for the ditto was spirit duplicator.

So in 1977 we advertised Rick Gardner’s spirit duplicator in our garage sale ad, and the Courier News spelled it with a capital S....as in the Spirit of God.

The machine sold quickly.

Then we moved to Cincinnati for two years, where our high school boasted school Spirit with a capital S.

The Spirit is not easily understood, nor contained!

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Alan Richardson, a scholar I’ve long trusted, says,

“The Holy Spirit is not a person existing independently of God.

It is a way of speaking about God personally acting in history...in our lives...

OR of the Risen Christ personally acting in the life and witness of the church.

The Spirit is one of God’s permanent ways of being God.

After the resurrection,” he says,

“the Risen Christ is equated with the Holy Spirit.

Christ himself comes in the coming of the Spirit,

And the church is shaped and guided by the Spirit of Christ,

who also guides us in understanding scripture.

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Speaking in tongues – called GLOSSOLALIA – is still practiced today, more among Pentecostal churches, where it could be said to convey more emotions than actual meaning.

Perhaps it was for that reason that the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians he preferred, in church,

five words of understanding to 10,000 words in tongues, (I Cor. 14:19)

and said the greater gifts of the spirit are FAITH, HOPE, and especially LOVE.

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If you will turn to # 349, we have a delightfully simple prayer to the Holy Spirit:
“Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me,
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me,
Melt me, mold me, Fill me, use me…..
Spirit of the living God, Fall afresh on me.”

One caution might be that in trying to make the separate persons of the trinity accessible for our differing prayer moods, or spiritual needs, it’s important that we don’t dissect the Trinity to the point of losing a sense of God’s Oneness.

For we have One God who is all the things we have described.

The Holy Spirit is really just God or Christ at work in our lives today!

The hope is that God’s Trinity can become more meaningful in an everyday way than just a mysterious doctrine,
as we become more conscious of differing approaches to God in prayer
and addressing God in ways that fit our particular need.

You may want to use the hymnal as a resource book, since so many of the hymns can be read as prayers, and are fitting for a wide variety of themes and situations.

Pouring over our hymnal in recent days, I’m impressed as never before with the inspiring poetry, prayers, and hymnody, we have at our fingertips.

Hopefully, praying to the members of God’s Trinity will open up new possibilities for our lives.

But, of course, sometimes when you have multiple choices,
The most fitting answer may not be any single choice, but “All of the above”. Amen.

We sing a hymn to the Trinity: No. 41 “Come, Thou Almighty King.”
(“Come thou Almighty King, thou Incarnate Word, thou Holy Comforter, great One-in-Three”)

BLESSING: And now, as you go from this place,

Know that you cannot go where God is not….

And wherever you go, in the words of the Apostle Paul,

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.” Amen.