

The Very Rev. Timothy E. Kimbrough  
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Trinity Sunday  
Propers for the same, Year C

Do you remember those heady days of the birth of your children? Depending on your generation there were categories of experiences that would be quite familiar. If your children were born in the 1930s or if you lived in the country through the early sixties, your children may have been born at home with grandmother or a mid-wife or the town doctor at your bedside. If your children were born in the 1950s and 1960s you likely went through now customary frantic dash to the hospital where the husband was ushered into a smoke-filled waiting room with the other would-be fathers. If your children were born in the 1980s or 90s, I suppose just about anything might have happened. Birth-moms may have had the whole family at the bedside. Your baby may have been born underwater. But most assuredly there was some sort of birthing class that the mother and father attended ostensibly to prepare them and set their minds at ease but with the inevitable effect of raising levels of anxiety—at least among those who were pregnant for the first time.

No matter how your baby was born, no matter the decade, no matter the customs that surrounded the ritual of childbirth as practiced in your town and by your people, I can imagine that the efforts to find a name for your baby remain among the more vivid of your memories. It's one of the first times that you and your spouse (post-marriage) were forced to make a decision together that would have ramifications for the rest of your lives. Do you draw on family names? Do you name your daughter for your best friend? Was there a literary character or author who had meant a lot to you? A community leader? A politician? A musician? A star? Of course, there was the reliable top ten list of names for that year? Or the old school name from the Bible?

Some cultures wait a bit. It's important to see the child and to pray about whom the child will be and what she will become. For such cultures, for such families the meaning of the name is more important as what the name sounds like. It may also be that the story that accompanies the name will be formative for the child (sometimes without the child's knowledge altogether).

So take for example, my own children—at least the ones we were privileged to name. Each of their names appear in some part of our family tree (on Darlene's side or mine): Joshua, Caleb, and Hannah. Each of their names appears in the Bible: Joshua, Caleb, and Hannah. And each of their names had stories or meanings that we hoped—once bound to the baby—would shape them, and mold them, into the adults that they are becoming.

Joshua was a strong leader, successor to Moses, bold, quiet (except at Jericho), and steady. His name means "God is salvation". Caleb was one of those Israelites selected to scout out the Promised Land. He and Joshua return and provide a minority report to Moses—"They may be giants but we must go. God has given us this land." Caleb is hearty, bold, unafraid, and prepared to go against the grain, if God's word is at stake. Hannah is Samuel's mother. She is surprised by Samuel's birth, after many years of being unable to conceive, and dedicates her son, that gift more precious than any, to

the service of God in the Temple. She is persistent, prayerful, unconcerned about looking foolish, and never failing in her pursuit of the Lord. Her name means, “grace”.

I prayed when they were named that somehow God might use these figures and stories to form them, to strengthen them, and to guide them through the wilderness of this present time and into the Kingdom of God. [We shall see.]

The Church has understood the importance of naming and of binding a story to each and every one of its members. Prayer books prior to 1979 had the priest address parents and godparents in the moment prior to baptism, saying, “Name this child.” Your baptismal name, your Christian name (now commonly known as your first name) was given you as you emerged from the waters of God’s womb, born again to live after and with a heart for the things from above. Birth certificates and record keeping practices of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have for the most part done away with this connection between baptism and the naming of a child—but the link should not be forgotten. We bind a name to the child at the time of her baptism believing that this will be the name by which God will call his new daughter/his new son.

At some Episcopal visitations around the country, if you listen carefully, you may note that some of the young people were encouraged to select confirmation names and to bind these names to themselves as hands were laid on their heads. I remember one brilliant teen, Morgan Grobin, selecting the name of St. Nicholas—the patron saints of sailors (among others)—to be her confirmation name. In doing so she hoped to have before her the skill, devotion, and wisdom, of that saint’s example, most especially on account of her love of sailing.

If we have thus far in the liturgical year celebrated the life of Christ from conception to birth to crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension...if we, last week, remembered with great fervor the giving of the Holy Spirit, and the empowering of the Church to go into all the world making disciples of the nations, then today we are equipped with the name that we will carry, the banner under which we will march, and the story that is to define, shape, and mold our own—God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We remember today the binding of this name to us and to our people. Trinity Sunday is rightly situated between the giving of the Holy Spirit to the disciples and the mission field to which they are sent because this name is the name by which we are to be known. We are people of the Trinity. We are people of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the God who is three-in-one and one-in-three. Some may think it a metaphysical riddle we seek to explain in our walk. Some may think it the result of political battles and the rants of church councils. Some may imagine it to be no name at all. But do not be misled.

This name, God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, tells us everything we need to know about why we were born, why we exist, what we are meant to be, and where we are going. This name, all at once, tells the whole story of our salvation. In it is contained all the love, the sacrifice, the judgment, the grace, the tragedy, and the hope of the world.

We need look no further than one of occurrences this name in the New Testament scriptures: 2 Corinthians 13:14—“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship (the communion) of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” Paul extends a blessing on the Corinthian community in the name of the Triune God. Again for those who might be tempted to the study of metaphysics for the sake of understanding this name look again at this verse. The reason this name exists is to bless. Did you think

the Trinity an abstraction that had little to do with your life, little to do with the politics of Washington, a downturn in the economy, wars fought at home and abroad, or the drug dealer who stands on the city corner just waiting for the approach of his next client? Nothing could be further from the Truth. This name revealed and hallowed has been given to us, bound to us, for the purpose of blessing.

We learn in this gift first that we are, the world is, in need of blessing. You did not choose these pews this morning over another hour in bed, because everything in your life is together. You did not choose these pews this morning because when you picked up *The Tennessean* today the editors had only the colors of late spring on which to comment. You did not choose these pews this morning because this was the place to be seen or because you had nothing else to do. You came because you recognized a brokenness in your life— a hurt, an illness, a sadness, a purposelessness, a depression, a deception, a betrayal. You came because you recognized a need for healing, a need for blessing. You came—even if you did not know it—seeking the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Edwin Hatch, an Anglican cleric, theologian of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and vice-principal of St. Mary Hall, Oxford, once wrote, “It [the Holy Trinity] reminds us that in our world of effort and failure we need the varied help of God. It reveals to us that God, who in His Trinity of Persons is very near to us, is near to us with a trinity of blessings.”<sup>1</sup> In this blessing, by this blessing, by the binding of this name to our hearts, we learn that we are children of the Eternal Father. We learn that the Eternal Son leads us to recover our lost “sonship”, our lost status as children of God. And we learn that by the Eternal Spirit we live and move and have our being.

Our brokenness leads us to the desire of this blessing and this blessing leads us to the praise of God and the praise of God leads us into the very heart of being: His and ours.

Take up this name; bind it to your heart. Tell it to your children. Shout it from the mountaintops. This name will save you. By this name captives will be freed. By this name the hungry will be fed. By this name the naked will be clothed. By this name stranger on the way is to be welcomed.

What are you as a Christian, if not this—born from above, born from the womb of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In binding this name to your heart, you seek to spread its blessing far and wide, on those who are far off and those who are near. Look to this name and be healed. Seek the power of this name and watch as it forms you, strengthens you, and guides you through the wilderness of this present age and into the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin Hatch, “The Threefold Benediction” a sermon delivered at Westminster Abbey, Trinity Sunday, 1888, in *Love’s Redeeming Work*, (Oxford University Press: New York, 2001), p. 488.