

British stand-up comedian turned actor and activist Eddie Izzard got quite a few laughs in the middle of his 1999 comedy show *Dressed to Kill* with an imaginary conversation between God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. It started with God complaining that the way most white Christians sing is less than joyful and Jesus complaining after his ascension his followers broke into many denominations. When God asked Jesus what the Holy Spirit had to say about all that, Jesus replied, "He's useless these days running around with a sheet over his head saying, 'Holy Ghost, I'm the Holy Ghost.'" Then God told the Holy Spirit to knock it off by saying, "This isn't an episode of Scooby Doo." And the Holy Spirit said, "I'd have succeeded if it weren't for those God and Jesus fellas."

Like I said, it got laughs, even I laughed at its playful exploration of the Holy Trinity, the church's doctrinal belief that God is Three Persons One God. You've probably heard a lot of preachers confess from the pulpit they don't like to preach today because this belief is said to be impossible to understand as it is a holy mystery, therefore impossible to explain, therefore any attempt to do so is heresy, a church word for false teaching. So, many preachers feel they have been set up for failure and just ignore the Trinity and preach on something else. Others try hard to help us get some understanding of the Three in One Mystery. But there are always problems with such attempts that often result in criticisms from professional theologians and scholars. Preachers don't always get it perfect, still we want to try and make the invitation for all people to get closer to God and each other, even on Trinity Sunday. Instead of making today about math problems that can't be solved or academic debates that cannot be won, maybe we could see Trinity Sunday as an invitation to engage our holy imagination and play or dance with Love that is God.

Perhaps one of the reasons it is difficult to understand God as Trinity is that we make it hard by overlaying this doctrine with other beliefs, such as a structure of power and hierarchy like there was in Eddie Izzard's playful sketch where God was definitely the boss, the one with the most authority and power and Jesus was his second in command, leaving the Holy Spirit nothing left but boredom and lost ambitions. That's why it got laughs because people can relate to that power dynamic. It's similar to Norse or Greek mythologies where Oden or Zeus reign over the lesser gods who struggle for attention. Or many human families where there is a patriarch or matriarch who favors one family member over others. Institutions or businesses have similar structures where the boss reigns over the workers who struggle to succeed by gaining attention and there is always the

person who thinks they would have made it if it hadn't been for someone more influential, gifted, or just luckier than they were. This is a structure we find everywhere, and it is a structure that supports divisions.

This can make the Holy Trinity difficult for us because it is *not* like Eddie Izzard's sketch. The Holy Trinity is not against itself, because God is not divided. God, as we read in the Gospels, is love. Not the love created by hierarchies that favors those who favor the powerful. God is not the love of greed. God is love that creates all life, God is love embodied in Jesus who gathered into himself our brokenness and divisions so that we can experience the love of healing forgiveness and reconciliation, and God is love embodied in the Holy Spirit that is with us in good times and bad, guiding us and calling us deeper into the loving mystery that is God.

Christian mystics of the past described Holy Trinity as Love always in motion, like a dance, a relationship that does not need to struggle against itself because it supports itself.

This is also tough for most people to relate to. We are used to relationships that are based on the push and pull of power; where it's important to know who is in charge and who isn't. That God could be different is difficult to imagine. But what if, even if just for one Sunday a year, we try. What if, for one day we try and let God be God. What if we try and imagine God as a relationship that is love that looks like support that carries each other?

It doesn't have to be impossible. It does require letting go of what we think God is and surrendering to what God is. It can happen and it does happen in our world in our time to people like you and me. It happens to me every now and again. Especially whenever I trust that I am part of something larger than the structures and hierarchies that make our society and institutions function. And when it happens, it brings new life.

One lovely time it happened was when I was my first year in seminary, which we call the Junior year. That year got off to a rough start for me as I discovered a portion of my fellow seminarians who did not believe women should be ordained priests in the church. They said some pretty awful and hurtful things. Yet, they were still part of the community. No one kicked them out and they did not receive much in the way of punishment. Justice, you could say, did not prevail. And I still had to serve them in my role as chapel scholar, one of only six seminarians who oversaw the seminary's worship space. One day during the Evensong service we had at the end of every weekday, I stood in the very back so I could keep an eye on the service and discretely slip out if anyone needed anything. I looked at the community in their seats in the chapel: my fellow

seminarians, the professors, and the dean, and gently, yet firmly, I was overwhelmed – in the best sense of the word - with a sense of love for the whole community. Yes, some individuals were angry, some were against me even being there, others were going to be good friends, some already cared about me, and all of it was swept up in something I can't describe well in words, emotions, numbers, or data, but it was real. It was love that did not originate in me or from me, this love was simply present and drew me and everyone in the chapel into it, so that we all were part of it. And in that moment, whether I wanted to or not, I found I truly did love everyone in that community. After that experience it didn't seem to matter as much what individuals did or didn't believe about me personally, we were still part of a community. Because it was small, we still had to help carry each other. And just by doing our part, I grew to understand those who thought differently than me, and they came to see me as a person, not a theological concept, and we recognized God's call in each other. In the end that is what really mattered, because God is larger and more real than our prejudices. We all grew less divided because being right didn't matter as much anymore, and we grew a little closer to each other and closer to God. Because for one brief moment, we had joined in the dance, the movement, the flow, the love that is God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

An experience of Trinity – what some call transcendence - can happen in places other than seminary. Many believe that is what can happen when we share the sacrament of Holy Communion. Others find transcendence when listening to music or reading from a sacred text or poetry or story, or looking at a piece of art. Others say transcendence happens when they are outside under a tree or walking on a path through the woods or sitting by a lake or river. Others say transcendence happens whenever we let ourselves be touched by the beauty of God and in that moment realize what matters most is love that is God that joins us together.

I read recently that more Americans feel discouraged and distressed about the future because there is so much suffering and injustice now. It can be difficult to imagine anything different from what we are experiencing right now, and this can lead to nostalgic longing for the past, or worse to despair. But as Paul so beautifully articulated in his letter to the Christians in Rome, whatever we are feeling now is not all there is. Realizing things change can be what gives us hope, not because of our own cleverness or skills or intelligence or experience, but because – like what I experienced in the chapel in seminary – God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. This love is powerful enough to bring arrogant seminarians together and make them respect and love each other, and this love, when accepted, when lived, can do just as much wonderful, healing, reconciling good in all our lives, and can make the world better for all people.

Perhaps we need the reminder – even if we only get that reminder one day a year - transcendence is possible and happens in our time. Perhaps if we had the reminder more often, it wouldn't be so difficult to imagine.