

Sermon, *Blackholes, Donuts and the Holy Spirit*  
The Very Rev. David Marshall, All Angels by the Sea, 6.15.25

Happy Father's Day. And, happy Trinity Sunday. The two celebrations land on the same day today. It's my tradition to share an example of the Holy Trinity on this Sunday. Today, I'm going to use the example of a boston crème donut. But first, let's talk about what the Trinity is.

Scripture and human experience point us to the idea that God has three faces – Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, commonly called God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. They are the Three-in-One. God is One but has distinct attributes or faces. Over the centuries, the Church has come up with ways to try to explain the uniqueness and One-ness of God. (It should be noted that each time we try this we create a so-called “heresy” because there is only one God so any explanation will inevitably fall short) Take the boston crème donut. Imagine that God is the dough, Jesus is the filling, the Holy Spirit is the glaze and chocolate frosting. When we pick up the donut, we are touching the Holy Spirit because, like in this metaphor, the Holy Spirit is all around us. Everyone who eats a boston crème donut wants the filling in the middle. And, that is Jesus, of course. If you wanted a boston crème but all you had was a pile of dough, that's not the entire donut; or just the crème filling or just glaze and the chocolate frosting; none of it is complete without the other. God is God. You can't take just the Holy Spirit and forget God the Father and God the Son; likewise with taking just Jesus, because God and Jesus are the same thing. As such, the donut has three distinct flavors and textures, but it is all one donut.

Okay, that's my example for this Trinity Sunday. Now, on to the message I was given for today: Blackholes.

If you are not familiar with the astrological concept, blackholes are an anomaly in space where something, let's say a really dense and heavy rock, has so much gravitational force that it sucks everything into itself including light. Blackholes started as a theory but now have been “proven” as much as astrophysicists can prove it without actually visiting one and running a bunch of really scary and probably life-ending tests. As it stands now, there are black spots, called holes, that are visible through telescopes. No light can escape them.

Metaphorically speaking, we sometimes have blackholes in our life. Something happens and we feel like we've been sucked into a blackhole where not even light can escape. Let me start with a simple example about a car accident and a blackhole.

When I was a senior underwriter for a large insurance company, I reviewed about fifty claims a day. There were some involving blackholes. Here's a garden-variety example: our insured was sitting at a red light and the car behind her failed to stop in time and caused \$1500 damage to her bumper. But, the real damage came after the accident. Our insured couldn't stop thinking about the accident. She stopped talking with her friends. She won't drive and go to work because she has to go through that intersection and she's afraid to.

In this garden-variety example, I noticed that first person she opened up to about the blackhole that was consuming her thoughts, her energy, her peace and friendships and work life was the insurance adjuster. Once she opened up to how she is doing, she started to feel better – especially

when the adjuster says, “You are not alone, a lot of people feel this way after an accident. But, once we get the repairs scheduled for your car, you’ll feel a lot better.” And she did. She called a friend and told her what happened. She then told her boss. And, the next day, she drove a rental car (provided by the insurance company) and went to work. After a week her car was repaired, and she was feeling almost back to normal.

That’s a blackhole experience. Something happens, it creates a metaphorical blackhole in your life, and all your energy, peace, joy, friendships and all the rest get caught in its gravitational pull. It won’t let go unless there is an outside effect or factor that will help lessen the gravity of the situation. That’s where the Holy Spirit steps in.

The good news is that the Holy Spirit is unaffected by the gravitational pull of the blackholes in our life. The Holy Spirit can walk right up to the event, or the really dense object in our life, that is sucking our peace and joy and time and attention. The Holy Spirit can walk right up to it, look at it from all angles, and then walk away from it. Gravity of our blackholes has no effect on the Holy Spirit.

This is good news for many reasons. The first one is that you can share, in prayer, with the Holy Spirit that one thing in your life that is acting like a blackhole. Whatever your share will not negatively affect the Holy Spirit in any way. People who I’ve talked to that are experiencing a blackhole say they don’t want to tell anyone to “burden” them or “pull them down” with the weight, or gravity, of the situation. You don’t have to worry about that with the Holy Spirit because it won’t affect the Spirit! Spill the beans, tell the Holy Spirit everything about the loss or event that is sucking in all light.

Another aspect of the Good News on this is that the Holy Spirit will not let you be held captive by the blackhole. The Spirit will do something that can help if you choose to seek help.

Prior to being called to All Angels, I served a congregation that had been in great distress. When distress happens to a church, or any organization, there will be resistance for positive change. One day, I received an email from a church member that sent me down into a blackhole. In the email, he said I was doing it all wrong and I was not a good priest (summarizing here). The more I read, the more light was being pulled into this newly formed blackhole. I forgot about the love my family has for me and perhaps even the love God has for me. I wondered if maybe I was a bad priest and I should do as this person says and go crawl back into the hole from which I came. I lost a good hour of my life being sucked into this blackhole. And then something happened. I prayed for God to help. Then, somewhere deep inside of me, I had the idea that I should call my friend, Jack Tolley. Fr. Jack, as he is known, is a retired priest and was at the church I was serving. He too had served churches in distress, so he knew of the pressure I was under. Out of the blue, I called Jack. He picked up and within a few seconds said, “What wrong David, you don’t sound like yourself.” I told him about the email. Jack said, “Read it to me, in its entirety.” I told him that I didn’t want to break any confidences; Jack interrupted me and said he has already put on his stole, anything he says to me will remain with him and God alone.

I read the letter verbatim. Jack listened and then was quiet once I finished. He then drew in a deep breath and said, "I had no idea [that man's] soul was so far lost; I had no idea he was so depressed and angry." A little more silence past and I blurted out, "Yeah, but what about me?!" Jack chuckled and said, "My brother, please tell me you are not taking this personally. This has nothing to do with you." I replied, "It sure feels personal." Jack said, "Well, it's not; it's about him and how much work we, and God, have in front of us to help this poor man's soul."

The Holy Spirit knew about the blackhole. The Spirit walked right up to it, looked at it from all angles, and then walked away. Somewhere along the line, the Holy Spirit put the idea in my head to call Jack. And when I did, the email lost some of its power. The more we talked and then the more I prayed, the blackhole started losing its sucking power until it vanished. What was left was compassion for "that poor man's soul."

Within a year, he and I became friends.

In today's Scripture lessons, we heard a short section of St. Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter five. This chapter is a shift in direction. In the first four chapters, Paul talks about the fallen state humans are in. In this chapter, he shifts to the good news of the power of God's grace. Yet, this is no fairy tale with a they-lived-happily-ever-after ending. We have God's grace through faith which bring us peace; but there will still be suffering and hardships. Paul writes, "We are okay with suffering, however, because we know that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope."

Fr. Jack has had his share of endurance and character-building events that give him hope. That's how he was able to have compassion for the writer of the email and clearly formulate a plan to work with God to help that poor man. This all started with the cry for help and the Holy Spirit that can walk up to a blackhole of human emotion and suffering and walk away with a plan for salvation.

One more story (which I have the expressed permission to share with anyone who it may help). I had a parishioner and friend named Teddy. Some of you may remember a couple of years I flew to San Diego to preside at a funeral – it was for her. She is the only female I have met named Teddy but she was unique and had one of the strongest faiths I have ever encountered. I was her pastor and friend and, as she would say often, "I call you father, but my heart sees you as one of my children." We had that type of close-knit relationship. One day, in the middle of Lent, she was scheduled to have knee surgery. On the day of the surgery, I was with her in the prep room. She asked for her husband, Richard, to leave for a moment. She looked really troubled and took my hand. She started crying and said, "I feel just sick about this surgery. I believe I am wonderfully made by God and look at what I've done to his creation. I have worn out my knee and now the surgeon is going to remove part of what God has made and put something fake in there."

I said, "Teddy, your knee is almost 80 years old. You are wonderfully made but some things just need to be repaired." I then asked about her son, Scott.

Fifteen years ago, when Teddy and Richard were on vacation in Ireland, their 38-year-old son Scott was playing an outdoor basketball game when he had a massive heart attack. The MD said he was dead before they even called 911. Teddy went into a massive blackhole with the death of her son. After a while she reached out for help. The Holy Spirit sent Teddy to a woman who also has lost a child. She began the process in Teddy of allowing light to shine through her suffering. Because of the endurance she received, the Holy Spirit created Teddy's character which produces hope. Teddy had her own ministry of helping people breathe through the loss of a child and gives them hope.

Back in the hospital prep room, I told Teddy that she has an important ministry and that God needs her knee repaired so she can "wear the shoes of peace" and help others. Teddy dabbed her eyes with a tissue, smiled and said, "Thank you, I just needed a little reminder." It seems like Teddy was creating a blackhole of shame around needing knee surgery. She reached out, with the power of the Holy Spirit, and that blackhole disappeared.

Life is going to have its share of blackhole moments. But the energy, peace and light that they absorb does not affect the Holy Spirit. God can bring us the help we need. And sometimes, God uses us to others when they are caught in their own blackhole.