

Today is Trinity Sunday. It is the day celebrating the mystery of faith and unity on and of the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. There are two things I want us to understand about the Trinity today. First, calling God "the Father" as the first person of God in the Trinity does not mean that God is a male, even though the term "Father" implies masculine characteristics. "Male" is a biological word, and God is not a biological being. God is Spirit.

"Then," someone might ask, "why do we use the masculine term to describe the first person of God in the Bible?" Well, it is because it reflected an ancient patriarchal context when the Bible was written. The texts in the Bible have absorbed patriarchal values of the context, which in turn are used to justify beliefs and institutions that harm or subjugate women. Well, I will not go too deep on this subject now due to the limited time we have. However, my point is that the text cannot be fully understood without understanding the context.

The second thing that I want us to understand about the Trinity is that the Trinity reveals God's belief in teamwork. This teamwork acknowledges the distinctions or differences of the three—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—in mutual respect without entailing subordination or hierarchy. God has brought a team together to accomplish God's purpose.

Today's story titled "Rebuilding the Walls" is about this teamwork. Even though today's story is titled "Rebuilding the Walls," it is actually about rebuilding God's people after the exiles returned to Judah. For rebuilding the people, the task of rebuilding the walls around Jerusalem was recognized. This task requires God's people to team up with God and each other.

Today's story takes place nearly 60 years after Zerubbabel led thousands of exiles carrying temple treasures, gold, and silver back to Judah to rebuild the temple. Most of the displaced Jews did not return, having settled well in their new communities. As always in history, some people had hearts fully set on God, and some did not. Later, God sent **three people with vastly different gifts** to rebuild God's people.

The first was **Ezra**, who had been serving the king in Babylon. Ezra brought 1,500 men and their families with him to Jerusalem, along with lots of gold and silver donated by the king and others. However, Ezra soon discovered that the city's leaders had been unfaithful to God. Ezra mourned, fasted, prayed over the situation, and led the people into confessing sins and repenting. Then he taught them about God, God's law about loving God and loving people, and God's purpose for the descendants of Abraham. Ezra ministered to the people's spiritual needs.

Nehemiah, another gifted leader, helped those in Jerusalem with other needs. Jerusalem's walls were broken down, and in those days, a city needed walls to protect its inhabitants from raiders and other enemies. Nehemiah also led thousands of exiles back to Jerusalem. His first order of business was to assess the condition of the walls, and he quickly rallied the city leaders to rebuild.

However, the leaders of nearby territories were not pleased with the rebuilding project. They were threatened by the prospect of Jerusalem's comeback. They retaliated with intimidation and made repeated attempts to out-manuever Nehemiah and his rebuilding project. But Nehemiah was undeterred. He encouraged his leaders and armed his people. Some worked while others stood guard. Even when Israel's enemies enlisted an Israelite as a false prophet to undermine the progress, Nehemiah was not shaken. He refused to entertain empty lies, and the wall was rebuilt in record time—only 52 days!

Although, for a time, the people returned to the worship of God, old habits die hard, and the people's zeal soon dwindled. The priests and the people became apathetic, so God commissioned the prophet, **Malachi**, to speak God's words of divine warning. Malachi prophesied the return of the prophet Elijah as a sign of things to come.

God had restored God's people and protected God's faithful remnant through three distinctive leaders—Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi. With their gifts, they partnered with God and partnered with the people God had given them to rebuild God's people.

God bestows upon all God's people spiritual gifts, which each person is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity (1 Corinthians 12:4-7). There are three kinds of spiritual gifts—ministry gifts, manifestation gifts, and motivational gifts.

The ministry gifts are the way God works with what believers do to serve others and meet their needs. It's how we minister or "ad-minister" the love, grace, and truth of God to others. There are different "ad-ministration" such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, and helpers (Ephesians 4:11-13, 1 Corinthians 12:28).

The second types of spiritual gifts are manifestation gifts that people tend to sensationalize often by disqualifying themselves from enjoying them. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, "God gives all of us, not just some, these gifts." These gifts are a message of wisdom, a message of knowledge, faith, the gifts of healing, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in different kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). It's commonly thought these gifts are only to minister to others, but that's limiting the grace of God. For example, the Spirit can give us a message of wisdom when we ask for one in our lives, just as God can give us to deliver to someone else.

The last types of spiritual gifts are the motivational gifts that motivate our words and actions. It's a filter we're given for our perspective, shaping how we relate to and serve others. These gifts are prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy (Romans 12:6-8).

All these gifts are wonderful and have a place. Some may sound more important than others, but that is not true. All gifts are distinctive, but all are equally important to rebuild God's people in God's loving community. What gifts can you identify in your life and ministry? [pause] May we all recognize the gifts we have received from God and utilize them to rebuild God's people in partnership with God and with our siblings in Christ. Amen.