

Sermon for Trinity Sunday Year C

[RCL] Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15; Psalm 8 or Canticle 13

Many of us love a good mystery. It's no accident that BBC television manages to churn out series after series of delightfully entertaining mystery programs. Sherlock Holmes is ever popular. Some of us probably have favorite mystery writers whose novels we love to read.

But when it comes to today, Trinity Sunday, it's not unusual for preachers to note that this is our only liturgical feast day devoted to a doctrine, to a great mystery. Many preachers will then dive into a pithy attempt to explain the mystery of the Holy and Undivided Trinity in five minutes or less. These efforts are rarely successful, and they are often heretical. You see, the Trinity is a rich mystery, and it does not lend itself to bumper-sticker summaries. More to the point, to reduce deep mystery into a size that we can rationally comprehend misses an opportunity to open ourselves up to divine mystery rather than to close down possibilities.

All that said, if you want a manageable introduction to the Holy Trinity on the occasion of this great feast day, the Wikipedia article is actually a pretty good history of the development of the doctrine and a decent explication of our current understanding of it. If that sounds daunting, you can head over to YouTube, and there Lutheran Satire has produced a four-minute video that hilariously shows the pitfalls of simplistic views and then takes us right to the threshold of the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

Rather than trying to shrink a vast mystery into a short explanation, it seems better to ask ourselves what the Trinity has to do with us today. How does the Holy Trinity connect to our day-to-day lives? How can we be drawn more deeply into an unfathomable mystery?

Last Sunday, on the Day of Pentecost, we focused on the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. This theme continues today in our Gospel reading from the sixteenth chapter of John, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth."

Jesus was speaking to his disciples – his close friends – just before his final meal, arrest, and crucifixion. In addition to his promises that we would be raised to new life on the third day, he wanted his followers to know that God would never abandon them, that the Holy Spirit would be their companion and guide forever. He was reassuring them that though they were about to face seemingly insurmountable challenges, God would be with them.

We humans are programmed to look for answers in our own minds. We are trained to rationally define our reality, not to seek deeper reality. We are trained to be leaders, not followers. And Jesus says we don't need to do any of that. We are freed from the limitation and the tyranny of rationalism. We are freed from the limits of materialism. We are freed from the pressure to act as if we have it all figured out.

Imagine, if you will, a different way of approaching the challenges of our lives. Imagine listening to God, rather than informing God of how we'd like things to work out. Imagine that we come to

see that there is a deeper meaning to our reality than material goods and the accumulation of more stuff. Imagine that we can turn to God for guidance when we face difficulty.

Friends, we don't have to imagine: that is our reality. In the Trinity, we see a God who is with us always, who shows us perfect love, and who never abandons us.

Some years ago, a priest from the US was traveling to another part of the world on a mission trip. There, the priest struck up a conversation with the local Anglican bishop. It turns out that the bishop had visited the US several times and knew The Episcopal Church pretty well. The priest asked the bishop about his perception of The Episcopal Church compared with the local Anglican church. With great gentleness, the bishop replied something like this:

I love your church. The problem is that you have too much. When you have too much, it is easy to forget that you are dependent on God. Here, we do not have enough of many things. Every day, we are reminded that we are utterly dependent on God. This means that we must pray fervently to God every day. We know that we are utterly dependent on God.

The bishop's point was that comfort breeds complacency. Material abundance makes us think we have our important needs met already. We can then start to think of God as a person on whom we call when we want something. We can forget that God offers us everything, and we are always dependent on God, whether or not we can see this.

In Jesus Christ, we see everything there is to see about God's love. We see a person who entered our world in the humblest, most ordinary way possible. We see a person who loved everyone and who challenged everyone to be transformed. That's an important point: Jesus never said to someone he met, "You're perfect just as you are" but rather invited every person to be transformed by the power of God's love. Using prayer book language, Jesus invited everyone to "grow into the full stature of Christ."

In Jesus Christ, we see that God was willing to endure the pain and suffering of our humanity in order that we might see the wide embrace of God's love for all people. And in Jesus Christ, we see the triumph of God's love over death itself. We see, in the Resurrection, that God's love can make us fearless – that we don't need to be afraid of anything, not even death.

But the mystery of the Holy Trinity pushes us to look further. Last Sunday and today, as we think about the Holy Spirit, we see yet another dimension of God's love for us.

In the Holy Spirit, God has promised to be with us always, to guide us into all truth. The Holy Spirit's guidance and love is inseparable from the love of God the Father and from the love of God the Son. The Holy Spirit glorifies Jesus, and Jesus and the Father are one. There is a mutual glorification at work, and each person of the Holy Trinity reveals something about the other persons of the Trinity. And that is what can draw us into the heart of God's eternal love: the Trinity represents how God's very being is about relationship and love. The Holy Trinity is itself the manifestation of God's abiding promise to be with us at every turn, through every struggle.

This is Good News in our time. So often our temptation is to tear apart the fabric of society and put others down, but we see in the Holy Trinity a God who unites and glorifies. So often our impulse is to separate ourselves from that which challenges us, but we see in the Holy Trinity a God who is eternally steadfast. So often we limit our reality or our possibilities to what fits into our own finite understanding, but in the Holy Trinity, we see a God who promises to lead us into all truth, into deeper mystery.

Today, let us not try to explain away something that is unfathomable. Instead, let us join heartily in songs of praise to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. And let us give thanks that this Triune God loves us more than we can imagine. Let us give praise for our God's everlasting presence in our lives in this age and in the age to come. Let us savor a God who offers us the very best mystery of all, a love that is beyond anything we can ask or imagine. Amen.

Written by The Rev. Scott Gunn

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