

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Psalm 8
Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

Grace to you all and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I've spent much of my life as an engineer and as a scientist. A scientist is on a constant quest for knowledge of how the world works. An engineer seeks ways to use this new knowledge to make life better for other people. People in my former line of work take great pride in their ability to know things. But sometimes we become too impressed with our own level of knowledge. Pride takes over and we find it difficult to admit when we do not, or can not, know how or why certain things are as they are.

For instance, when my daughter was preparing a science fair project years ago, she asked me why it is that moving magnets could make electricity flow in a nearby wire AND flowing electricity can turn a piece of nearby metal into a magnet. I can describe in great detail how these two processes work because I have experienced them and I have measured them. But I see only the results of the processes. I don't know how this relationship between electricity and magnetism came to be. There remains an element of mystery at the heart of something as common as the origin of the electrical power we use in so many ways every day of our lives.

If you stop and think about it, you would have to agree that there are many things that contain mystery at their core. How do trees, which have nothing like a brain, "know" when to drop their leaves in the fall? How do those same trees "know" when it is safe to bloom again in the spring? How do so many birds, herds of wild animals, and even whales know when it is time to migrate north or south? How is it that two single-celled products of the human body join together and then organize and grow to become an entirely new human baby? What is love anyway and why does it grow so strongly between two people?

All of these things are mysteries in the sense that we do not have definitive scientific knowledge that tells us how and why these things are as they are. But we know that each of these things happen. We have experienced the changing of the seasons along with the trees and the migrating animals. We have welcomed new babies into the world and watched them grow. And we have fallen in love. We know these things by what we have experienced, not by the details of scientific investigation.

This is the time in the Church calendar when we celebrate the Trinity. We give thanks to our God who we experience as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. My scientific mind urges me to develop a formula that will definitively explain the Trinity for you this evening. But my efforts would be doomed to fail. You see, the Trinity is shrouded in mystery. We know our trinitarian God by the way we experience Him, not by the scientific or even historical evidence we might compile.

We cannot even turn to the Bible to find a place where Jesus or anybody else describes the Trinity for us. It took several hundred years of experience, experience in living with the teachings of Jesus, experience studying the Bible, and experience living with the work of the Holy Spirit before the doctrine of the Trinity was developed by the founders of the Church.

Paul's letter to the Romans shows how he experienced what we would later call the Trinity. Paul gained confidence that he was saved by what God had revealed to him. He looked around and realized that all that is, everything, was created by God from out of nothing. From the beginning, God had been with His new creation. He walked in the garden long ago with Adam and Eve. He promised Abraham that He would build a great nation from Abraham's children. And later He led Moses and the people of Israel out of their slavery in Egypt. Yes, God was with them in the past. But God seemed to be unreachable and unapproachable.

When the people fell away from God's ways and ignored His promises, God came to be with us in a new way. He became human. Jesus Christ walked with us, ate with us, drank with us, and taught us. But more important than all of this, we know that Jesus Christ suffered with us. People sneered at His teachings and folks from His own hometown once tried to throw Him over a cliff. Later, He was accused, jailed, and put on trial for treason – treason against the religious authorities and the Roman Empire. He was whipped and beaten, and then He was nailed to a cross on top of a garbage dump outside of town. There He was left to die. Paul and all the rest of us have come to understand that God knows firsthand what it is to be human.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He gave us all a special gift. He gave us the gift of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God's presence with us even now. The love of God poured the Spirit into our hearts so that we may know His peace. Even as we suffer through whatever life on earth dishes out to us, the Spirit is with us during our suffering to give us comfort and advice – the advice to live our lives in a fashion similar to the way Jesus lived His own life.

These are the things Paul experienced. Christians of every time and in every place have come to understand our God in this very same way. And yet we have always understood that there is but one God, not three. God, the God of creation, the God of the Bible, the God of all, *must* be one God. Theologians, those big thinkers at seminaries and monasteries, are not the folks who developed the concept of the Trinity. It was people like you and me who by our experiences came to know God in these three important ways. The theologians, much like religious scientists, have worked for more than 1,700 years to construct a formula to explain one God in three persons. They have been unable to remove the mystery of the Trinity. My guess is that this riddle will never be solved. After all, haven't we been told that God's ways are not our ways and God's thoughts are not our thoughts?

Mary W. Anderson tells a story about an experience she had when she was three years old. Her story shows us how to relate to such a complex relationship. Ms. Anderson relates:

I was watching my grandmother sleep during her afternoon nap. As I contemplated her existence, I thought wisely. "That's Grandmama, Mamma, and Odell." She smiled in her sleep as I called her by the names used for her by her grandchildren, her daughter, and her husband. Three names, three relationships – and yet the same person ... Amazing!

Yet, a little later she writes:

...how important is it to explain the mystery of God revealed to us in three distinct ways? Mysteries explained cease to be mysteries, don't they? Perhaps the

doctrine of the Trinity challenges our secret wish to know God fully and eliminate all mystery. This, after all, was the burning desire of our first parents in the Garden, a desire that ultimately caused them to fall from grace. Does this temptation to dispel all mystery still burn within us?

I think it does.

The concept of the Trinity is very difficult to accept for modern people whose whole attitude is toward mastering and controlling the world. We all want to be educated so that we can be in control of the situation and make things work according to our own need. But education in the Christian faith is an education not to master God but to be mastered by God.

This morning we will witness the mystery of the Trinity at work. Aidan Christopher William, one wondrous child known by three names, will be baptized in the name of our one Triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Today, he will be given God's sacred promise. We will share this mystery together, and we shall rejoice at the experience we share this morning. We shall also rejoice as we experience the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit along with Aidan Christopher William in the years to come.

Let us take time to celebrate the mystery of the Trinity because by joyfully acknowledging things we cannot fully understand, we allow our Triune God to take His proper place. By doing so we let God be God.

Amen.

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