

May 30, 2021

This is Trinity Sunday. A day when we focus on the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Trinitarian language permeates everything in our worship-- we gather in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit... We receive God's forgiveness through the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit... We recite the creed, naming the Father, Son and Holy Spirit... We baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit... It's everywhere in our worship...

The Trinity is indeed a mystery... There's longing in mystery... Mystery is inviting, it pulls us into a way of thinking that expands, rather than contracts. Trinitarian theology always pulls us into the ever-bigger picture of God.

Our gospel reading today is a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. We had a part of this reading just recently... Nicodemus is an important religious leader. And he has some inkling that Jesus might actually be who he says he is-- the Son of God. So, he's curious, there is something about Jesus that is a mystery to him.

And Nicodemus asks a very honest question, he wonders, "How can these things be?" Jesus responds by saying essentially that the proof is in the pudding... Jesus says, "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen." The testimony is all about that which has been received from the Father by way of the Spirit, and it's all about abiding in that life-giving relationship...

Quick story... In Seminary, we read a ton of books on the Trinity, we covered the Trinitarian controversy, we examined Trinitarian heresies, we studied the politics of the formation of the creeds. We listened to a ton of lectures on creation, redemption, and sanctification... lots and lots materials—and it only really began to scratch the surface!

One class was called an *Overview of Christian Teaching*... It was designed to give us a broad view of Christianity. I think we pretty much covered a years' worth of material in half a year! Its purpose was to give us a vantage point to step back and see the bigger picture. And I found it very helpful!

We wrote four major papers in that class, one about the Father as the creator, one about the Son as the Redeemer, one about the Holy Spirit as the sanctifier, and finally one big paper, putting it all together, the three in one and the one in three.

My experience with writing these four papers was interesting. The first paper was about the Father as creator... I talked about my life as a Shepherd, about being present at the birth of lambs, gardening... Stuff that I suspect every farmer knows intimately! My professor gave me a lot of good comments.

The second paper was all about Jesus, the Son... I wrote about the Christological controversy, I elaborated on Luther's Christology, I compared and contrasted that with James Allison's Christology...

I had a lot of quotes and footnotes and a long bibliography. When I handed the paper in, I felt pretty proud of it. Boy, I thought I sure am smart...

When I got the paper back, the professor commented that I while I did a good job telling her what others thought about Jesus, I hadn't really said anything about what I thought about Jesus...

At first, I felt defensive, but then the more I thought about it, I realized she was right. That paper was more like a book report, than anything else... Since then, my own journey into discovering Jesus has been less about my head and more about my heart.

My paper on the Holy Spirit went well, in fact I focused on a verse from our reading, "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So, it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

In the paper I did some reflecting on how I felt to be baptized, to be literally blown into the church, and then into seminary. And this experience of the Spirit was always very real and personal for me... In fact, recently, I had a conversation with someone I used to work with thirty years ago. I mentioned I ended up in ministry. She responded by saying, "Well, I didn't see that coming." I said, "Well, frankly, either did I!"

The Holy Spirit does indeed work in mysterious ways!

Now in the fourth and final paper, we were asked to integrate the three in one and one and three. And here's what I came to realize... Throughout my life, and in different seasons of my life, I've felt closer to one than the others... And I've come to see that the strength of the Trinity, is in *the differences* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as well as in *the union* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit...

At different times in my life, I was drawn to God in a different way. And there is tremendous strength in this.

As the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God is Himself a community unto Himself. As the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God is complete and whole.... A complete self-giving of one to the other, and for the benefit of all; a community fundamentally all about love...

This is essentially the same meaning as the Body of Christ—where we are all different, with different skills and abilities, and together we are all stronger because of it.

The good news today, is that we worship the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; the three in one and the one in three. All working in concert for the redemption of the world-- for the sake of the world! As our gospel reading puts it, "Indeed, God did

not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” Indeed, Amen...