

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

June 4, 2023 (Holy Trinity Sunday, Year A)
Genesis 1:1-2:4a
Psalm 8
Matthew 28:16-20

Today is Holy Trinity Sunday. This is a day that has been celebrated in the Christian church since the 9th century. This is the day we get to talk about the Trinity, about who God is. So to begin, I have a little instructional video for you.

(Show *St. Patrick's Bad Analogies*)

I show that video just about EVERY year on Trinity Sunday. I have to admit, when I was a young and FOOLISH pastor, I USED those analogies. But over time I've come to realize that, every time I did, it was heresy. That's what HAPPENS when you try to EXPLAIN GOD.

The modern American prophet, Garrison Keillor, from "A Prairie Home Companion," said THIS about LOVE: "We should NOT think that we have figured this out, because it is not a PROBLEM, it's a MYSTERY and ALWAYS WILL be."

Now, doesn't that offend you just a little bit—the suggestion that there are some things in life that we HAVE not, and WILL not EVER, figure out?

I've heard scientific explanations for love that boil it down to simple bio-chemistry in the brain.

I had one parishioner years ago that always said that love was just the coalescence of geography, biology and timing. His wife always CRINGED when he said that.

Now that we've become so ADVANCED that we can send ourselves messages back from Venus, and this smart phone has more computing power than they had on the moon-landing mission, with ALL THESE ADVANCEMENTS, we're not really OPEN to the suggestion that there are things that ALWAYS HAVE been, and ALWAYS WILL be, MYSTERIES to us. We assume that our only LIMITATIONS are time and energy, and, given enough of THOSE, there's really NOTHING we can't ultimately KNOW.

So when we come to God, to a doctrine like the Trinity, the temptation is to want ONE NEAT ANALOGY, ONE CONCISE STATEMENT that will make it all clear, that will SETTLE it once and for all.

Well, I hate to disappoint you, but "It is NOT a problem, it's a MYSTERY, and always will be."

There are SOME mysteries we CAN SOLVE. But OTHER mysteries, like love and GOD, who after all IS LOVE, CAN'T be solved, and must be LIVED with and CELEBRATED.

And when you think about, would we really WANT it any other way? If we really UNDERSTOOD LOVE, would it be so GREAT, so POWERFUL. If we understood GOD, that wouldn't BE God at all, because when you UNDERSTAND something, you have POWER over it; it's NO LONGER ALMIGHTY.

So today we celebrate that God is a MYSTERY. Words can't DESCRIBE God any more than temples can HOLD God. Frederick Buechner said THIS of the Trinity: "Father, Son and Holy Spirit mean that the mystery BEYOND us, and the mystery AMONG us and the mystery WITHIN us are ALL the SAME mystery. Thus, the Trinity is a way of saying something about US and the way we EXPERIENCE God." (p. 93, Theological ABC)

So, let me SAY something about how we EXPERIENCE God. With EVERYTHING we've EXPERIENCED, with all the CHANGES we've ENDURED in our lives, we feel a little out of control. In the face of INEXPLICABLE EVENTS, we don't know what to DO OR SAY. We don't know what will

happen next. It feels like we're caught in a storm in the middle of the night, and we can't see the HAND in front of our face. It feels like chaos.

Thankfully, according to our reading from Genesis 1 God is the MASTER of chaos. Before creation, it says "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters" (1:2). Before creation, it was CHAOS, something dark and dangerous and WORSE than NOTHING. The waters were stormy and threatening and incomprehensibly deep. It was chaos itself. But God CONQUERS it with nothing more than a WORD: "Let there be light." Then God CREATES and ORDERS EVERYTHING. God gives everything a PURPOSE and a NAME. HOW isn't the IMPORTANT part of the story; it's WHO that's important. God is the ALMIGHTY, the MAKER of heaven and earth.

We have a holy and awesome God. Psalm 8 says it: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you have set in their courses, what is MAN that you are mindful of him, the SON of man that you should seek him out?"

But God DOES seek us out. God CARES about us. Jesus, the Son, came and lived among us and taught us God's ways. He showed us the MEANING of love. And he DIED to GIVE us eternal life.

Then the Holy Spirit came with the promise, "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." In the Spirit, God is WITH us FOREVER.

You see, God is love; the love in and among the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the love that spilled over into the creation of the universe; the love that overflowed in the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son; the love that ran over in giving birth to the church, and SUSTAINING it to this day, so that OUR love would pour out as we "go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

God is the mystery BEYOND us, and the mystery AMONG us and the mystery WITHIN us, but the SAME mystery. This is the God IN WHOSE NAME you were baptized, the ONE God in THREE PERSONS, who is committed to LOVING us in EVERY way.

Our LIVES may be a mystery to us, and at times they may FEEL like they're TOSSED on the sea, like CHAOS, but the God OF mystery has AGAIN SPOKEN a POWERFUL word by CLAIMING you and NAMING you CHILD OF GOD. And WITH that WORD, God continues to still the chaos – God STILLS YOUR chaos. We have nothing to fear, because, like ALL creation, we are in GOD'S HANDS. God has a PURPOSE for you.

In the end, the Trinity isn't about EXPLAINING God; it's about how we EXPERIENCE God, WHO God is to YOU. Whether you experience God in the CREATION, or ON THAT CROSS, or IN this COMMUNITY, and in your SERVICE and in SHARING your FAITH, HOWEVER you EXPERIENCE God, we worship the SAME God, the ONE God in THREE PERSONS.

WE have a PURPOSE. TOGETHER, let us show the world that all of our LIVES, and all of CREATION, is in God's hands. GOD IS LOVE, and the world will SEE that love through the hands of his CHILDREN.

You were CREATED, and REDEEMED, and SENT with a PURPOSE. And WHEN that purpose feels like TOO MUCH, when the WORLD feels like CHAOS, REMEMBER, God is "WITH you ALWAYS, to the end of the age."

That's ALL you really NEED to know about the Holy Trinity. Amen.