

Sunday, June 11, 2017 – Trinity Sunday
“So What?”

Matthew 28: 16-20

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Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

"Everybody loves a mystery," or so the saying goes. Just by observation it seems to be true enough. It's why we've got old shows like Columbo, the X-Files or Law & Order reruns, and Sherlock Holmes. And there's a longing and lingering for mystery and fantasy with twists and turns and secret knowledge and cryptic revelations that must be unraveled and pieced together have made the adventures of Harry Potter and the Lord of the Rings and basically every superhero movie. They make them because they sell – everyone loves a mystery.

Yes, "Everyone loves a mystery" or so it seems, until it comes to God, then people want answers and explanations. "Why doesn't God do this or that?" And "I just can't believe in a God who would let such and such happen." Today is Trinity Sunday and I will warn you before we begin that it is not so much a day of answers and explanations but a day of awe and inspiration.

The sole focus of today's worship is the mystery and majesty of God. It is beyond our comprehension. You won't be able to walk away from here today saying, "Now I understand - God is triune - three unique persons but one divine being - it makes perfect sense." Beyond our comprehension certainly, but not beyond belief, and that is all God is after - that you might pray, "Lord, I believe, help me overcome my unbelief."

That does not mean we should not ask questions. Christianity is not about turning your brain off and blindly accepting everything you are told. God longs for us to know Him more and more. Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." The problem is not the questions we have, the problem is the attitude of the human heart that demands the answers it wants to hear.

Christianity too often is boiled down to a mindless, self-help program whose only purpose is to help people improve their lives. In other words the vast majority of people, and

let's be honest and say that that includes you and me at times, only interest in God is discovering what's in it for us.

No wonder more and more people stay home on Sunday morning - the measuring stick is not entering the presence and encountering the mystery of God, but rather that this style of worship or that preacher did not really speak to my needs. Worship can then become like episodes of a talk show where we deal with the issues and problems of the audience and God's presence is almost irrelevant.

That's why the Trinity - the teaching of God's identity - three distinct persons together in one divine being - is so hard for us. In a culture where value is defined by the question: "how will it help me practically, how does it help me get ahead or improve my condition?" the Trinity is of little use.

Now, I could recite the history to you. I could spend a great deal of time leading you through the passages of Scripture where the work of God the Father is revealed as creation and preservation of this world and everything in it. I could show you that the Spirit and Son were not sleeping or kickin' back while God the Father created and preserved but were intimately involved as the Spirit hovered over the darkness in the beginning and then the Father spoke and His Word accomplished exactly what was said - and that same Word which accomplished the creation later became flesh and made His dwelling among us, so that in Him we have seen the Father.

We could spend hours and a lifetime discussing the mysterious revelation that Jesus is that Son who was with Father and the Spirit in the beginning but for the purpose of our salvation took on human flesh and form to enter time so that you and I can return to a kind of place like Adam and Eve first lived in that was "very good" and knew of no such thing as death. His birth through Mary was accomplished by the Father through the Holy Spirit delivered by the lips of angels. The Spirit caused Mary to conceive an infant in her womb without a human father so that God could become like us and bring us home again.

I could carefully construct the teaching of the Scripture that you cannot believe what I am telling you about the Father and the Son unless the Holy Spirit penetrates your thick head and your hard heart with the message of God's purpose and plan for your salvation. The cross of Jesus and its forgiveness and the resurrection of Jesus and the eternal life it promises are absolute nonsense to the human mind. And then in the time we have left I could explain the careful and precise development of Trinitarian language over a 350-year period as the early church struggled to keep the mystery of God's awesome identity from being swallowed by man's foolish attempts to make God more practical and useful.

And when I am finished you might well be impressed with my knowledge and eloquence and still walk away wondering what difference it makes for the struggles you are having in your family, the financial crisis that confronts you, the ache and the pain you feel in your body from illness and in your soul from tragedy and loss.

And the answer, to "what difference does it make" may shock and surprise you at first and will most certainly challenge you if you dare to listen. I am afraid as speak the words you will think me crass and uncaring, perhaps even mean. The problem we face this Trinity Sunday, the reason that the mystery of God's identity causes less curiosity in us than UFO's and stories of witches and wizards, is the cold hard reality that we are so self-centered.

The original temptation of Adam and Eve has infected us all. The devil whispered, "Eat this and you will become like God." They ate and the center of the universe, your universe and mine, shifted from God to self. The problem this Trinity Sunday and the reason we have so little genuine interest in exploring the mystery of God's nature as three persons in one divine being is simply that this isn't about you – it's about God!

Do you understand? It's not about you! God pleads with you every Sunday to turn you inside out. Jesus repeated himself again and again, "whoever wants to be the greatest must become the least;" "whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will gain it;" "the last will be first and the first last;" "whoever wants be great must become the servant of

all," and all the while the disciples fought over "Who is the greatest?" It is not about you! It's about God.

The Holy Spirit never says "Look here I am over here, pay attention to me." The Spirit is like a teacher who draws a stick figure on the whiteboard representing Jesus and then stands behind the board, reaching around with one hand points to the image of Jesus: "Look at Him, listen Him, learn from Him, follow Him, worship Him, be devoted to Him, serve Him, love Him, be preoccupied with Him."

And then we turn our eyes to Jesus and what do we see - never once does He say "it's about me, me, me" instead He very carefully and consistently directs us heavenward, saying, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing". He wants only to show us to Father. And when our eyes go up the Father calls down from above, "This is my beloved Son, whom I love, listen to Him."

God calls you again today into His mysterious presence. The Spirit whispers, "it's not about you, look at Jesus." Jesus says, "behold how much the Father loves you." The Father keeps pointing us back to the cross, back to Jesus, over and over, His life, His suffering, His death, His resurrection to overcome our fascination with ourselves and give us the power to live. Discovering that life is not found in the pursuit of our personal happiness.

Discovering that real life is found in the mystery of the Trinity - the self-sacrificing nature of God. That is real life. The advantage of believing in the Trinity is not that we get an A from God for giving the right answer. The advantage of believing is that it is the only successful way to deal with reality - only in Him, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will we find life that lasts more than the few years we are here.

It is Trinity Sunday and God comes not solve the mystery of His nature but to draw you into the mystery, to write you into His story, so that, even while all your questions may not be answered, you might see and know Him exactly as He wants you to – and it will be very good. In Jesus' name, Amen.