

John 16:12-15

“Don’t stare directly at the sun.” We are told this from a young age. And yet, on this Trinity Sunday, it feels like we are attempting to do just that- to stare directly at the brilliant, blinding, dazzling light of God in an attempt to see and understand God as Trinity. And I dare say, it is a dangerous thing to try and describe God. In fact, preachers all over the world struggle on Trinity Sunday over what to say and we fear falling into heresy (heresy is simply wrong teaching). I remember my seminary professor telling us that almost everything we say about the Trinity is heresy...her words still echo through my ears every Trinity Sunday. A priest friend of mine posted on Facebook a picture of a kitten right before Trinity Sunday a few years ago that read, “How not to commit heresy while preaching on the Trinity: Say nothing and show pictures of kittens instead.” Well, I don’t have any kitten pictures- so I’m going to live dangerously this morning and rely on some words.

We could start with this question: Who is God? Who is God to you? How might we finite humans with our finite language try and describe an infinite God? Knowing that in the end, our language will fail and fall short?

Still, when we are asked, “What is the Trinity?” It’s helpful to have some kind of response (esp. if you’re clergy). We could try and offer an explanation of how God can be both one and three at the same time using a mathematical equation. We could say, although $1+1+1=3$... $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$. That’s pretty good Trinitarian math. Or, we could use the imagery from our creed, which proclaims that God is “light from light”- and rely science and explain the Trinity to be like the sun: 1 light source emanating 3 forms of light:

Ultraviolet light can’t be seen or felt. (The Father?)
Visible light can be both seen and felt. (The Son?)
Infrared light can be felt but not seen. (Holy Spirit?)
I like that metaphor. But we have to admit, these explanations fall clearly short of really capturing the essence of the Holy Trinity. And so, inevitably, someone will ask me, “Why can’t you explain this

more simply?” And I will lean on CS Lewis to respond, who wrote, “It is no good asking for a simple religion. After all, real things are not simple. They look simple, but they are not. The table I am sitting at looks simple: but ask a scientist to tell you what it is really made of—all about atoms and how the light waves rebound from them and hit my eye and what they do to the optic nerve and what it does to my brain—and, of course, you find that what we call “seeing a table” lands (us) in mysteries and complications which you can hardly get to the end of.”

And so if trying to describe the act of seeing a table can lead us into mystery – then surely seeking an explanation of God as Trinity will. And so we are left in a very mysterious place. But the importance mystery was the focus of our last Formation Series on the “Mysteries of the Faith.”

Perhaps this is why Jesus said those cryptic words in our Gospel reading today when he said, ‘I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.’ It’s as though Jesus is acknowledging that words will fall short – and so we must wait upon the Holy Spirit to lead the way into the deeper truths and mysteries of God.

And if that’s the case, then isn’t it possible that the only way to truly grasp God is to go beyond words and intellect and to experience God with our heart and soul? To lean into the mystery of knowing God spiritually instead of trying so hard to understand and describe God with words? Doesn’t any authentic relationship we can ever have with anyone involve embracing the mystery of another person and knowing them in a way that goes beyond words and descriptors?

I told our Formation series class the following quote about mystery from Albert Einstein. He said, “The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom the emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand

wrapped in awe, is as good as dead —his eyes are closed. The insight into the mystery of life, coupled though it be with fear, has also given rise to religion. To know what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness.”

My friends: mystery is a wonderful thing to be embraced- the acknowledgement that some things are simply indescribable: Mystery is at the center of our faith- and the embrace of mystery allows us to let go of the need to have all the answers- it enables us to let God be as big as God really is – beyond our understanding and intellectual knowledge. But we have to be willing to embrace mystery ...to experience God as God is, and that requires an open mind, heart, and soul...it requires faith.

Before I learned about the origin of the doctrine of the Trinity in seminary, I imagined the doctrine was developed something like this (you may have this same notion):

A bunch of old white, well-educated churchmen got into a room and decided they would explain to the world who God is - and they used a lot of unnecessary fancy words to do it – and to tell of us regular people that God is Three in One – that God is a Trinity. And so we all ought to be in awe of their amazing knowledge. (And that’s not completely wrong- but it’s wrong where it really matters.)

Because when I actually studied our history – I found out the origin of the concept of the Trinity was quite the opposite. What happened is that all of us regular people were the first ones to try and describe what we later called the Trinity. It was a grassroots movement by the people in the ancient church - all experiencing God together while they worshipped, and prayed, and took the sacraments— they experienced God spiritually as three in one – as God living within them as the Holy Spirit, and as God loving and knowing them as their Creator, and

then they were experiencing and communing with God in and through their relationship with Jesus. It was the body of all the faithful people of God gathered together in worship and prayer who came to know God as at Trinity. And all those learned old churchmen then had a dilemma and a challenge before them: to put that amazing spiritual experience that the people were having into words. The Church knew God had been revealed in the Bible as one God – as the Shema describes it, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.” They were monotheistic believers (one God). And yet, there they were experiencing God in these three ways – in three persons. The struggle for the Church in putting together the doctrine of the Trinity was not a struggle to describe an intellectual knowledge – it was a struggle to put into words what they were experiencing at a spiritual level. And if that’s the case – then why do we think we today, we could possibly know or understand God by simply reading the words they chose to describe that which is ultimately indescribable? (You see the problem with preaching on the Trinity?)

SO what’s the take home? I believe the invitation of today- of Trinity Sunday – is not for us to finally understand the Trinity – it is an invitation to faith: to dip our toes in and more fully experience the Trinity –to experience our God in prayer and worship and by opening our hearts in faith to the mystery that is God. A God revealed as love. Because you have been invited into a relationship with God... not into an intellectual ascent of God. And this invitation is into a dynamic relationship of love already being shared among and by the three persons of the Trinity in self-giving, each one revealing God to us in a unique and personal way. And we are invited not only to share in that life, but to establish our own lives based on this Trinitarian model of love and equality. As we do this, we become like the saints of God.

A little girl who once asked her mother who the saints were. Her mother thought the best place to go to find an answer to her question would be a church building. They walked into the church, and as they did so, the little girl gasped in amazement

as she looked at a beautifully illuminated stained-glass window. "Now I know who the saints are!" the little girl said. "They are the people who let the light shine through."

On this Trinity Sunday, we are invited to embrace the mystery of God - we can let go of trying to stare into the sun and explain it, and instead, experience the love of God – and let the light shine through.

Amen.