

**THE TRINITY AND  
THE INVITATION TO INTIMACY  
Matthew 28:16-20  
Sermon preached by Dr. Cahill  
Babcock Presbyterian Church  
Sunday, May 26, 2013**

Last year after I preached my annual sermon trying to explain the Trinity, that is, God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, one of you came up to me and said, "**Harry, for years I've been listening to preachers try to explain the Trinity.**" There was a slight pause, and I was sure he was going to say my sermon made it all clear. Instead, he concluded, "**you know what I think? I don't think you understand it either.**"

The word trinity doesn't appear anywhere in the Bible. But if you look carefully you'll see verses using the formula, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and in John's gospel, we find Jesus spoke of his intimate relationship with the Father through the Holy Spirit. But Jesus' discussion on this sacred three way relationship wasn't meant to clear the air. Jesus just said this relationship exists, leaving us to conclude there aren't any adequate explanations, illustrations or parables to help us comprehend God. We're simply teased with just enough information to keep us wondering.

Every year on Trinity Sunday I like to tell the story about St. Augustine, puzzling over the Trinity while walking along the beach one day when suddenly he saw a boy with a bucket running back and forth from the sea pouring water in a little hole. "**What are you doing?**" the good saint asked. The boy replied. "**I'm trying to put that ocean into this hole!**" Right then and there Augustine realized he was trying to squeeze the infinite into his finite mind.

You get the picture? The Trinity is beyond our comprehension, a mystery wrapped up in an enigma. And yet, even though we'll never fully understand it, we still need to take a stab at it so we can be prepared to participate in this Mystery.

So we approach the trinity not with the expectation of understanding it, but so we can be nurtured by the mystery of God. You don't need a PHD in trinitarian theology, but you do need to be aware so when God comes near you'll be ready to accept the invitation to enter into an intimate relationship with God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

And really shouldn't that be our ultimate purpose, to enjoy the dynamic, free flowing relationships between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit? After all, our Christian faith is based on being in right relationships with God, your neighbor and yourself so we can receive love and be loved.

Maybe we should begin with what the trinity is not. The trinity is not three gods in one or one. Yogi Berra was once talking about his unique relationships with Yankee owner, George

Steinbrenner and the team's manager, Billy Martin. Known from time to time to mangle metaphors he said, **"Me and George and Billy are two of a kind."** If the three of them are two of a kind, you can see how easy it is to confuse something that's three of a kind.

The early Church Fathers recognized this potential for confusion so bishops and theologians counseled together until they came up with the best Bible-based explanation humanly possible.

First, the church reaffirmed one of the oldest creeds of the faith found in the Book of Deuteronomy, **"Hear O Israel the Lord your God is one."** The Hebrews were the first to recognize God is both transcendent and one. This insight was liberated from having to cope with multiple petty gods who needed to be constantly bribed with sacrifices for their good favors.

Empowered by this insight the Hebrews were now free from anything except their own free will keeping them from God. It was into this faith Jesus was born and as I said according to the Gospels, it was Jesus who first used the formula FATHER, SON and HOLY SPIRIT. Besides that many times Jesus spoke of God as his father and even used the word "Abba" Aramaic for "daddy" implying a deep intimacy and love between the two.

Later, after Pentecost, as the Church experienced the Holy Spirit, that's when the formula "three persons in one" arose. We worship one God who reveals himself in three different ways; as God the Creator, God the Savior and God the Comforter. In short, the same God who created the world also saved the world and for good measure keeps the world moving in the right direction, which is ultimately back home to himself.

Let's now take a brief look at God as the Creator, God the Savior and God the Comforter and consider how these three compliment each other and then how you and I are invited to be intimately involved with each one.

First God, the Creator. I remember the catechism question from my childhood, **"Who is God?"** Answer: **"God is the supreme being who made all things and keeps them in existence."** In other words God alone is the ultimate creative power in the universe and responsible for keeping it in order.

Occasionally Bill Blair, one of our members and as many of you know an astrophysicist, leads two or three-week seminars about God's creative power and nature being a reflection of God's grace. Besides being a scientist, Bill is also a photographer and during his classes, while playing a recording of sacred music, Bill would read from the Psalms, while showing slides of beautiful cloud formations, majestic mountains, magnificent trees and budding flowers.

One of the benefits of being in a personal relationship with God is when you see a gorgeous sunset or become one with the eternal rhythm of the ocean lapping against the shoreline, you're able to see beyond the creation and catch a glimpse of the Creator. In that moment of revelation, you can feel very small but simultaneously very grand because in those special, even sacred moments God

becomes very real, very close and very wonderful. Unfortunately, when your relationship with God is skewed, and because of our sin this is an ongoing problem, we sometimes can't see past the creation to "see" God. That's when things go wrong.

In Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities*, the main character Sherman McCoy, a young investment banker, psychs himself up daily for the challenge of making himself number one for still another day by repeating the mantra, "**I am the master of the universe, I am the master of the universe...**" Of course, when you play Master of the Universe, you become a slave of your illusion.

You know from your own experience that trying to manipulate people and events ends up being a draining and frustrating exercise. That's why we need a Savior to get back into a right relationship with God the Father. Through Jesus, God became one of us. To truly become one of us he had to be real.

Nelson Rockefeller was an heir of the Rockefeller fortune and the governor of New York. To connect with the voters and let them think he was one of them, Rockefeller would boast he attended New York public schools and played with his friends on the city streets. What he didn't say was wherever he went, he was followed by a legion of body guards and that if he got tired of his friends or was about to get in a brawl, he would be whisked away in Daddy's limo.

Jesus was born in a manger, raised in a small town, freely moved among the poor and was nailed to a cross. His father never sent body guards to keep him from danger. Jesus was truly one of us and came to repair our broken relationship with God so we can be friends with God.

And yes, it's possible, indeed probable, to be friends with God and not be afraid of God. The historian Steven Ambrose wrote about the American G.I. during World War II and how his presence restored hope and removed fear from the conquered people of Europe and Asia.

"Before the spring of 1945 around the world the sight of a twelve man squad of teenage boys armed and in uniform brought terror to people's hearts. Whether it was a Red Army squad fighting in Berlin or a Nazi squad in Poland or a Japanese squad in Manila, that squad meant rape, pillage, looting, destruction and senseless killing. But there was one exception: a squad of American G.I's, a sight that brought the biggest smiles to people's lips and joy to their hearts. America sent the best of her youth around the world not to conquer, but to liberate."

Likewise, God sent Jesus into the world to liberate us from sin, and our worst fears. What's more, Jesus demonstrated God's unconditional love when he suffered and died on the cross.

Finally we have God the Holy Spirit. Last Sunday we celebrated Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came to empower the Church to continue what Jesus began. Like the wind, sometimes the Spirit is a gentle breeze other times the Spirit moves with the full force of a hurricane, but always the Spirit moves to bring us into the presence of God. And as we become more and more aware of God's holy presence, which surrounds us like air, we find ourselves becoming transformed as we

leave our old sinful self behind and become more like Christ.

What's more the Holy Spirit wasn't only present in bible times, but our generation too turning us from being lost sinners into being members of God's family.

Last Monday tragedy hit again, this time not an act of terror but an act of nature as Moore, Oklahoma was devastated by a tornado. Whole neighborhoods were wiped out, more tragically men, women and children died.

And yet stories quickly emerged of neighbors helping neighbors, teachers risking their lives to protect their students, family members tearfully embracing each other while reunited right after the storm and everyone thanking God for getting them through it.

On CNN Wolf Blitzer was interviewing a young mother whose house was blown away yet miraculously she and her baby lived. Probably because being in the Bible-belt and hearing over and over again, God got me through this," Blitzer said to this woman, "I'm sure you thanked the Lord for his protection." The woman suddenly looked nervous, shrugged her shoulders and said with a weak smile, "Actually I'm an atheist." Blitzer was understandably flustered, until she added, "I don't begrudge anybody who lived through this thanking their God."

So where do good spirits and strong faith come from when life gets unbearable? Because we know the mystery of the Trinity, we know it comes from God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, empowering us to face down any adversity, trusting we can stand our ground and even be heroic through Christ who strengthens us.

The Sermon is entitled "**The Trinity and the Invitation to Intimacy.**" All of us crave intimacy. Without it we die. But intimacy with God guarantees life. The dark, destructive powers let loose in the world have no hold over us because God cannot be overcome. So, accept the invitation to intimacy with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Step into the mystery and become a part of the mystery and experience the greatest love ever known.

Let us pray!