

June 11, 2017

A Mystery to be Lived, not a Puzzle to be Solved

PRAYER

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

SERMON

Back in 1992, Gwen Shamblin created a Christian weight loss program called "Weigh Down." It began as a small business run out of her garage but grew into a multi-million-dollar corporation. But in 2000, her business was in jeopardy because of some comments that Shamblin made about the Holy Trinity. She said as a ministry, we believe in God, and in Jesus, and in the Holy Spirit. But we believe that there is a secondary relationship between God, and Jesus, and the Spirit. God is the father of Jesus and God sends the Spirit but the Spirit doesn't send God anywhere. God is clearly in charge.

She went on in an interview to explain a little bit more. She said, "You know that we believe that Jesus is God and Lord but there is a secondary relationship. There is not a coequality in leadership. God is primary." Now as a result of those comments, she almost lost her business. Many of the influential churches that had utilized her program withdrew from it. Several of her key employees pulled out of the company. And Thomas Nelson decided not to publish her book, which was to be published in one month. So, there were some real consequences to that. And when you stop to think about it, you might wonder. Well, why did what she say cause so much trouble, so much fall out?

Well when you stop to think about it and you take it to its conclusion. When she says that there's not equality in relationship. Then what she is saying is that Jesus is not truly God. Which for over two thousand years the church has proclaimed and tried to explain this doctrine of the Trinity. And what she says simply goes counter to the church's historical proclamation that Jesus is fully God and fully human.

Now today we celebrate the festival of the Holy Trinity. In which we celebrate the message that we believe in one God. One God who comes to us in three persons...as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As we try to wrap our minds around this mystery of the Trinity, it can be mind boggling. It can challenge us. If you want to sense how difficult it can be to grasp and explain this doctrine of faith. All you have to do is look at the Athanasian creed. Which is one of the three ecumenical creeds of the church. And in there it says we believe in one God...the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And what the Father is, the Son is, the Holy Spirit is. That there are not three beings but one is eternal. You read it and your mind just starts short-circuiting. It's almost like saying  $1+1+1=1$ .

So, we celebrate this festival of the Holy Trinity. We may find ourselves being a little bit confused but then again consider what John Wesley said. Wesley said, "Show me a worm that can comprehend a human being, and then I'll show you a human being that can comprehend the Trinity." Martin Luther put it even more bluntly. "To try to comprehend the Trinity threatens your sanity." And it's so true because it's so much more than we can grab hold of.

There's an old story about St. Augustine of Hippo who when he was writing his treatise on the Holy Trinity was really getting all bogged down in this. And so he needed to take a break and decided to take a walk along the beach. He was in Hippo in Northern Africa so he was walking along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. As he walked along he saw a little girl who was running down to the water with a bucket filling it and then running up on the beach and dumping the water on the sand. As soon as the pail was empty, she ran back down and filled it again and came back, emptied it again. And she did it over and over and over again. So, Augustine asked her what she was doing. She said, "I'm emptying the Sea." Well he gently tried to explain to her the futility of the task. But the little girl said, "I'll empty the Sea before you understand the Trinity."

Wherever the Gospel has been proclaimed, there have been elements of doubt. And we don't need to shy away from that. We don't need to be afraid of it. In fact, in the Gospel that we just read, we encounter doubt in an amazing place. The disciples had gathered in Galilee at the mountain where Jesus had told them that he would meet them. And then the risen Christ appears in their midst. And what does Matthew say? And they worshipped him, but some doubted. Huh? Here they were, standing in the presence of the risen Christ. They had already had been with him for three years. And now they were standing in his presence after the crucifixion and resurrection. Standing in his presence, seeing him with their own eyes. And some of them doubted? Yeah, some of them doubted.

The good news for us in that message is that even though some of the disciples doubted. Jesus didn't doubt them. And he gave the same commission to those who doubted that he did to those who were steadfast in faith. The mission to go into the world and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And that commission that Jesus gave to those disciples, he gives to you and me today. Whether we are steadfast in faith or we have our doubts. He gives us that same commission. Because even though there are times we may doubt Jesus or times we may doubt God. Jesus and God NEVER doubt us.

David Dunn in his little book "Try Giving Yourself Away" had an experience that kind of opened his eyes to the mystery of the Trinity. He was riding a bus one day that was driven by an exceptionally cheerful bus driver. The bus driver had a warm and kind word for every one that had got on the bus. And then another warm, kind word for the one that got off the bus. This really amazed Dunn and before he got off, he said, "You know you are the happiest and most joyful bus driver I've ever seen, how come?" The bus driver said, "I have to confess, I read an article in the paper awhile back about a man who died and gave a bus driver a large amount of

money because the bus driver was always nice to him.” (Laughter) “I thought I’d try it.” He went on to say, “I’ve come to enjoy it so much that it doesn’t matter if anybody gives me anything or not. It feels me with so much joy.” What started in the bus driver’s head found its way in his heart. And when it found its way in his heart, that’s when it became real.

And that’s the same with the Holy Trinity. When the truth of God’s love that we experience as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit finds its way into our hearts, that’s when it becomes real. Now, no matter how much we know about God, we will never know God. It’s not until we experience the presence of the living God and God’s love at work in our lives that God becomes real. And we know God.

So today we celebrate this Festival of the Trinity. The Trinity is a mystery, not a puzzle. Justo L. González who wrote the book, “The Story of Christianity.” Which by the way is truly the most readable church history that I’ve ever seen. Wonderful book. He made a comment about the Trinity. He said, “The Trinity is a mystery, not a puzzle.” You try to solve a puzzle. You stand in awe before a mystery. The Holy Trinity is not a puzzle for us to solve.

It’s a mystery for us to experience. It’s a mystery of God’s love made known to us in the Father, in Creation. Through the Son in our redemption and salvation. And in the Holy Spirit, the outpouring of faith within our hearts. And as we have these experiences of God’s love through the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Then it is that God becomes real. The doctrine of the Trinity in and of itself, doesn’t tell us all that much about God. But when we move beyond the words to the experiences of God’s love as Father in Creation, as Son in redemption, and as Holy Spirit in the gift of faith. Then the word Trinity tells us everything about God we will ever need to know.

#### PRAYER

May that peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN

Pastor V