

All for Love
John 3:1-17
Trinity Sunday
May 27, 2018 (B)
Pikes Peak UMC, Pastor Dea Sharp

John 3:1-18 The Message (MSG)

Born from Above

³ ¹⁻² There was a man of the Pharisee sect, Nicodemus, a prominent leader among the Jews. Late one night he visited Jesus and said, “Rabbi, we all know you’re a teacher straight from God. No one could do all the God-pointing, God-revealing acts you do if God weren’t in on it.”

³ Jesus said, “You’re absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above, it’s not possible to see what I’m pointing to—to God’s kingdom.”

⁴ “How can anyone,” said Nicodemus, “be born who has already been born and grown up? You can’t re-enter your mother’s womb and be born again. What are you saying with this ‘born-from-above’ talk?”

⁵⁻⁶ Jesus said, “You’re not listening. Let me say it again. Unless a person submits to this original creation—the ‘wind-hovering-over-the-water’ creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life—it’s not possible to enter God’s kingdom. When you look at a baby, it’s just that: a body you can look at and touch. But the person who takes shape within is formed by something you can’t see and touch—the Spirit—and becomes a living spirit.

⁷⁻⁸ “So don’t be so surprised when I tell you that you have to be ‘born from above’—out of this world, so to speak. You know well enough how the wind blows this way and that. You hear it rustling through the trees, but you have no idea where it comes from or where it’s headed next. That’s the way it is with everyone ‘born from above’ by the wind of God, the Spirit of God.”

⁹ Nicodemus asked, “What do you mean by this? How does this happen?”

¹⁰⁻¹² Jesus said, “You’re a respected teacher of Israel and you don’t know these basics? Listen carefully. I’m speaking sober truth to you. I speak only of what I know by experience; I give witness only to what I have seen with my own eyes. There is nothing secondhand here, no hearsay. Yet instead of facing the evidence and accepting it, you procrastinate with questions. If I tell you things that are plain as the hand before your face and you don’t believe me, what use is there in telling you of things you can’t see, the things of God?”

¹³⁻¹⁵ “No one has ever gone up into the presence of God except the One who came down from that Presence, the Son of Man. In the same way that Moses lifted the serpent in the desert so people could have something to see and then believe, it is necessary for the Son of Man to be lifted up—and everyone who looks up to him, trusting and expectant, will gain a real life, eternal life.

¹⁶⁻¹⁸ “This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn’t go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again. Anyone who trusts in him is acquitted; anyone who refuses to trust him has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it. And why? Because of that person’s failure to believe in the one-of-a-kind Son of God when introduced to him.

Today, and the last two Sundays (Ascension and Pentecost) have been really special days of remembering high points of what we believe and as the Church.

We understand that Christ's ascension, to sit at God's right hand, initiated the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. We "get" the progression...and it leading us into the season of Pentecost where we are to grow even further in our faith and understanding.

It's interesting then, that today, the first Sunday of the season of Pentecost – the one designated Trinity Sunday - is more difficult for us, 'cause, well: IT IS mystery. But, every year we are encouraged (forced?) to dig deeper into that mystery, which is at the heart of our Christian faith, to put some clarity on *what IS* the Trinity, and what **that** means about God and us.

Part of the difficulty is that the doctrine of the Trinity can't be found plainly in scripture.

"Love your neighbor" – we get that!

We can find it, chapter and verse, in Scripture where Jesus tells it, shows it, and expects it.

But there isn't an index of "subjects" listed where we can look up **TRINITY**.

I'm reading (several) books on Wesleyan theology. Chapters upon chapters of commentators trying to explain TO ME, what John Wesley believed about The Trinity. For centuries, theologians have reflected on scripture and our experiences of God revealing Himself and tried to explain:

God OVER us,
God WITH us,
and God IN us.

So, I guess we can be relieved that Trinity Sunday only happens once a year! I'd say, pastors and professors alike, don't give as much attention to Trinity as they could; about what it means.

We know we believe in God. But how can we explain THAT?

It's *not* that simple.

Nor am I knowledgeable enough....except to keep digging, right alongside you.

It is profoundly obvious that God is bigger than anything we can say or describe or imagine.

And even though we Christians DO have “our way” of understanding God, and we have our creeds and symbols are “Trinitarian” most of what we think or describe about God, admittedly, is incomplete.

At the same time, Dear Ones, the doctrine of Trinity is true and it matters.

I think we can all agree, no matter how long it’s been since we did a Bible study or sat in Sunday school, that there are two basic perspectives we can explore about the Trinity, about the doctrine that ONE God exists in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

First, the Trinity describes the way that we, as Christians, experience God. We know God as the Creator is also God revealed in the person and life of Jesus. That revelation happens by and through the Holy Spirit.

All three parts.

And if we sat and thought about it, in devotional time or meditation or day-to-day life, those parts TOGETHER are how we learn more about God and experience more about who God is for us.

This is the view we usually get when we’re talking about the Trinity. But there’s more.

The doctrine of the Trinity **also** talks about who God **is**.

And regrettably, we’re not exposed, often, to mystical theology that speaks more in poetry and awe rather than a precise, Webster’s dictionary-like definition.

So, for just a minute, let’s explore that.

And, borrowing from some 3rd century language (which as you listen will remind you of what we know as the Nicene Creed,) hear what those folks (mystical theologians) could say about God.

Once upon a time, way before the beginning of everything – not at the beginning, but before the beginning – God the Father, who is love and who

therefore must love, God the Father speaks his own name; He says his own word. And God the Son is begotten – true God from true God, begotten not made, of one being with the Father.

The Son is the second person of the Trinity.

Later, after the beginning, the Son will become incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and will be born as Jesus of Nazareth.

The Son is what happens when the Father expresses Himself, when the Father reaches out in His love.

Now, the Son loves the Father, for the Son is the Father's word, the Father's self.

And the Father loves the Son, totally and without reservation, and so the Father and the Son are bound together in love.

This love, which binds together the Father and the Son, is also real.

This love is God the Holy Spirit – the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

And the Son and the Spirit are of the same substance, the same stuff, as the Father; that's the only stuff there is.

In this way the Godhead is complete.

Three persons, each distinct, each real, each from before the beginning, each and all are one God.

The one-ness of God is discovered precisely in the free act of love by which the three persons of the Trinity choose to give all to each other.

This relationship is what makes God who God is.

Put another way, God is what happens when the Father loves the Son in the Spirit.

St. Augustine said this about the Trinity:

“Now, love is of someone who loves, and something is loved with love. So then there are three: the lover, the beloved, and the love. This relationship of love, God the Holy Trinity, is the foundation, the bedrock of the universe; it is the heartbeat of all creation. Everything that begins here, has its purpose and its meaning here, and will find its fulfillment here.”

Oh, those old mystic theologians!!

It's like the first time you tried to read Shakespeare – with a *“what? Let me read that one more time!”*

I guess that's the part about digging deeper each time we get the chance to work on our understanding of this concept, this “high-falootin’ word,” doctrine.

But, that's what's at the center of the Christian understanding of God.

It's simplistically that old VBS song “It's about love, love, love! That's what it's all about.”

The old image of God being a mean old man with a beard – that's not it.

Or that God is some force “to be with you” out of Star Wars. Nope.

And, humorously, God, the Trinity, isn't a peculiar little committee of two guys and a bird.

Instead, God exists, at GOD'S very core, as a relationship of love; love is the basis of all existence.

I SHOULD HAVE STARTED THE SERMON RIGHT THERE!

But, there it is, a quick look at the Trinity.

It is a complex and yet an exciting concept of who God is and what God is like.

And, like any good theology, it has consequences, and sets the stage for how we should live.

The apostle, **Peter** wrote in his letter that believers should learn, very early on, that they could tell whether they were truly taking part in the ministry of Christ by this criteria: of how well they were loving each other.

Why? Because relationships of love are what God is.

So, it's no wonder that the one new commandment that Jesus gives us is to love one another.

It's the commandment to **imitate Jesus** and his life as the Divine human being among us.

But, if we absorb the words earlier that molded the writing of the Nicene Creed, the love commandment also asks us to imitate Christ's life as the only begotten Son.

If we view this command, in the light of a growing understanding, of the interweaving of the three parts of God as the Trinity, we can begin to see what God really wants **from** us and what God really wants **for** us.

God's will and desire for us, is most of all, that we choose to share his life and become more and more deeply a part of that *relationship* of love.

As we grow in obedience (like Jesus stayed obedient even after death) we also grow in a constant, joyful relationship that is the very core of who God is.

After all, we are created in God's image.

Did you hear that?

We're created in the image of the interwoven, love-entwined Trinity.

So, the more our lives are shaped and formed by the life of love we see in the person of Christ and in the life of God, the closer we get to our best and truest selves. The more we become who **we** really are.

This business of the Trinity isn't just "mystical" or vague theology or something we avoid because we don't thoroughly understand it; it hasn't helped that for centuries the debates and explanations have made it more and more difficult to understand.

But, really, how basic and simple it is: to **be** love and therefore love **and** be loved.

Now, I may be simplifying it more than is comfortable for you, but, the Trinity is a right now, right in this moment, a very personal thing for all of us.

In some very important ways, it's about us – about us here and now; and forever.

'Cause, "in the beginning, before the beginning," the heart of creation is love.

And, we're created AND invited to be a part of and share that love.

Divine love is our source...

...our image,

...and our final destination.

That's good news.

It's good news about why we exist; and it's good news about our destiny.

It's too bad we only dig deeper about the Trinity once a year.

It's worth paying some attention to.

Praise God for those moments of digging deeper to understand tough theology about who we are.

Amen!