

## ***The Mystery Jesus Can't Explain (John 16:12-15)***

First Baptist Church, Jefferson City MO

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The First Sunday after Pentecost, aka Trinity Sunday (Psalm 8; Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Romans 5:1-5)

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Have you ever tried to explain something so difficult to someone and you knew you could talk until you were blue in the face, and you knew nothing you might say would alter the fact that you are not able to explain it in understandable terms?

Let's face it, some things are just too tough to explain. Jesus came to a point where he understood he had more he needed to tell his disciples, but he couldn't because they were simply unable to handle it all. He said a great many things about his relationship with God and about the Spirit, and there was more ... but he admitted those were things they *"could not bear now."*

What do you suppose he wanted to tell them? Some commentators point out that since all these words were written decades after the resurrection of Jesus, we can understand Jesus was trying to prepare his followers for his death and the surprise of his resurrection. Maybe he was also trying to prepare them for the days when he would not be with them and for the feeling of lostness they would experience. Kierkegaard rightly observed, "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards." Thus, the dilemma of the world of possibilities we can't predict.

Most of us spent some of our childhood daydreams thinking about what "might" happen to us off in the future. How about you? Did you try to imagine how your life would eventually unfold? Now that you are older, has your life been anything at all like what you imagined? I suspect that very little of your childhood imaginations have come true, or at least, they have come true only in a vague kind of way. But what would you do if suddenly you had a magical glimpse of how your life would turn out? Anyone out there who would want to know? Would you want to know the future in all its blunt honesty?

When asked to speak to a group of children, Gordon Cosby, pastor of The Church of the Savior of Washington, D.C., claimed there were two great truths about adulthood. First, he told them, it appears that life gets better and better. He claimed there is a sense in which life at twenty-five is better than life at twenty. And life at thirty-five is better than at twenty-five, and so on. It seems a part of maturity is the realization there is a growing sense of wisdom and accomplishment. Second, to balance that off, there is also the truth that life gets harder and harder. Life at thirty is more difficult than life at twenty. And life at forty is more complicated than life at thirty. Ever looked over your shoulder and wished for those simpler times when you were younger?

That's the part that keeps us from wanting to know too many details about the future! Just a sampling of sorrows from a crowd like this would make us realize that perhaps one of God's great gifts to us is that we are blissfully ignorant of what might happen next. From a saying recorded from the graffiti on a wall came this observation: "Time is nature's way of making sure everything doesn't happen at once."

Perhaps our ignorance of the future is God's way of not telling us more than we can bear.

We know from history that within just a few years after the time of Christ the political forces of Rome focused their fury onto the city of Jerusalem and the people there suffered enormously during that time. The people of God, both the Jews and the early Christians faced great bloodshed and the painful experiences of loss and grief. Would Jesus' cautious words of preparation have been helpful or was not knowing about them the wiser approach?

What Jesus offered them was not a clairvoyant look into the future. What he offered them was the assurance that no matter what happened to them, they would always have the Spirit-Presence of God there with them to accompany them through those experiences. That Spirit would be "with them" fully in each and every one of those events to give them comfort and strength for the moment to endure. It was an extension of that promise from Jesus, "*I will be with you always, even unto the end of the age*" (Matt. 28:20). What Jesus can't tell them about the future, he counters by offering them the presence of God in the form of God's Spirit.

This passage comes to us this morning because it is the only day of the year that we ponder the church's teachings on an idea that is represented by a non-scriptural word, Trinity. On Trinity Sunday, it makes us realize that it was a mystery not even Jesus could fully explain. In a way, because it is a mystery, the lack of a sensible explanation makes its own marvelous sense. Ironically, if we were able to explain it, it would cease to be a mystery. Do you want all the mysteries of the faith explained away? Isn't that a part of the wonder of being a believer in God?

Maybe a mystery writer can help us. Dorothy Sayers was not only an early 20th century English playwright and writer of mysteries; she was also a Roman Catholic theologian of sorts. In her play, "The Zeal of Thy House," she concludes the play with this speech by St. Michael the Archangel:

"Children of men, lift up your hearts. Laud and magnify God, the everlasting Wisdom, the Holy, undivided and adorable Trinity. Praise Him that He hath made man in His own image, a maker and craftsman like Himself, a little mirror of His triune majesty. For every work of creation is threefold, an earthly trinity to match the heavenly. First, there is the Creative Idea; passionless, timeless, beholding the whole work complete at once, the end in the beginning; and this is the image of the Father. Second: there is the Creative Energy, begotten of that Idea, working in time from the beginning to the end, with sweat and passion, being incarnate in the bonds of matter; and this is the image of the Word. Third: there is the Creative Power, the meaning of the work and its response in the lively soul; and this is the image of the indwelling Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

God is not Trinity simply because of some doctrinal or creedal claim hammered out in the councils of men. God is Trinity because God behaves in a Trinitarian way. (Remember that the word "trinity" never appears in the Bible.) But it's our experience of God that always ends up acting in Trinitarian ways.

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<sup>1</sup> Dorothy Sayers, *The Zeal of Thy House*, NY, Harcourt, Brace, 1937, 114-115, in Soards, Dozeman and McCabe, quoted in *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year C*; Nashville: Abingdon, 1994, 28-29

Trinity is about God ... but even that is unfathomable. What is more important is that Trinity is what the church is about. Trinity is a way of describing how churches fulfill its mission, because we do our best to live in the spirit of ... God as Creative Idea, God as Creative Enfleshment, and God as Creative Energy.

Here's how it works: Everything begins with an Idea. Ideas are good, but often they are only blueprints that describe a building project, only ink on a page until something more is added. By impulse, the Idea turns into the human passion of a group of people. The idea represents the real life sweat and zeal, the laughter and tears of people who live for a dream. And finally, the stories and the fabric are pieced and stitched together like the *"tie that binds"* by the spirit of love that holds them together. Ideas taking on flesh and flesh being energized by human passion and divine love. That is the work of the Trinitarian God.

Almost everything from God comes into being in exactly this way ... whether it's dismissing church one Sunday a year in order to worship God with our hands out in the community, or supporting the South Elementary school, or supporting mission partners where our members give of themselves and the church as a whole contributes for their success: Mission trips with our youth and adults to parts of the country where there's great poverty or to places like the Ukraine where the whole country is under siege. On the inside, this church is as diverse as any as "we have one of everything," but we experience unity around our commitment to missions. That is the work of the Trinitarian God.

A divine Idea burns in the hearts and minds of ordinary human beings of envision something new that needs doing. Recall Wendell Berry's idea to "find something that needs doing and do it."

Idea and Flesh become real because of the Divine Energy that makes all of it come into existence out of nothingness.

It doesn't matter much how you label them ...

Father, Son, Holy Spirit  
Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer  
Idea, Enfleshment, Energy

Everything we do, in the Kingdom work of the Church, everything done in the community of faith, is all about Trinity. Jesus understood we could learn to trust the divine imagination who promised the Triune God is the one and the same God who loves us deeply and wants to include us in the partnership of grace and reconciliation.

Who could argue with that kind of logic?

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