**“Transformed by the Trinity” – John 16:7-15**

I wonder if you’ve ever tried to explain the Trinity to someone, perhaps another adult, or a kid as a Sunday School teacher or a teenager as they journey through Confirmation. I’ve used lots of illustrations to try and make it easier: God is three-in-one like one stereo can play CDs, cassettes and records…but that example didn’t age particularly well. Or, I’m sure you’ve heard the one that describes God as H2O existing as solid ice, liquid water and water vapor. Or, I could reach back into history and borrow Saint Patrick’s teaching aid - the shamrock - which he was said to have used to explain the Trinity to the Irish pagans.

But, all our metaphors and illustrations fall short of the reality of God’s mystery and majestic. They never capture the entirety of God. In today’s gospel Jesus tells his disciples that although he had many more things to tell them, they couldn’t handle it. We can be somewhat assured that even the disciples, despite having spent time with God in the flesh, also struggled with their own limitations in trying to figure out God too. Richard Rohr, the Franciscan monk and writer, reminds us that “God is not only stranger than we think, but stranger than the mind *can* think” (p.161). Applying logic alone to the quest of understanding God won’t actually bring about more knowledge of God.

Jesus also says in today’s passage, that it’s actually better for his disciples that he leaves, because then the Spirit will come as a Companion and guide. Or, actually perhaps in a better translation would be, that the Spirit would come – and despite the limits of our minds – will *re*-proclaim all the things that Jesus had shown through his life and teaching.

So, on this day I don’t look at our many limitations as a stumbling block, but rather as a reminder that God can’t be boxed in. God must always transcend our grasp, even our most intelligent grasp.

In the church calendar, Trinity Sunday is the day when we stand back from the extraordinary sequence of events that we’ve been celebrating over the past five months—Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost—and today, reflecting back over the liturgical year, we try to look directly at the mystery and majesty of all God has done and make sense of who this Three-in-One God actually is.

It’s a challenge, sure…but, I believe that meditating on the Trinity…can powerfully change us. This morning I want us to contemplate three things: 1) the unknowability of God, 2) the timelessness of God, and 3) the invitation to relationship that this Triune God offers us. All these aspects have the potential to transform us, and change us and our vision of ‘who God is’ and ‘who we are’ so completely that all we can do to is worship. This is what Trinity Sunday is all about; stretching our imagination until it breaks or at least until it entertains things that we once thought *im*possible – because the bottom line is worship. So, I trust that you will join me as we allow our imaginations to be stretched.

**To start,** the doctrine of the Trinity is as much a way of saying ‘we don’t know’ as of saying ‘we do know.’ There are few things that can plunge us into humility quicker, than someone asking us to explain the Trinity to them.

*But, how does God’s unknowability and our humility bring about transformation?* Well, I suggest that being plunged into humility, is a lot like being plunged headfirst into Holy God. The ancient desert fathers and mothers knew that humility was the way to holiness. So, rather than applying the logical mind to the pursuit of knowing God, we must apply a completely different faculty.

To **know** God has very little to do with intelligence and very much to do with a wonderful mixture of confidence and surrender. God is not available to be dissected, examined or manipulated And yet God is always and immediately available to the sincere and humble seeker of love and union. Rohr says it best, “God waits until you are capable of an I-Thou relationship, or edges you in that direction (p.181).” Surrendering our need to know everything, surrendering our fear of failure, and our anxiety around personal inadequacies is hard but necessary in the quest to know God. Surrendering is an act of humility, and it’s all a natural part of the journey of faith, of this pilgrimage that we’re all on, and it works to transform us from the inside-out…creating in us the capacity for “an I-Thou relationship”.

This Sunday everyone will hear that the Holy Trinity is a mystery, but “a mystery is something that can be experienced even if it cannot be explained,” and it is **in** the humble experience of the “I-Thou relationship” that we are transformed.

**Second,** the doctrine of the Trinity testifies to the Eternal God. As Augustine said, “Our God is forever ancient and forever new.”

Ok, as I said a second ago, a mystery is something that can be experienced even if it can’t be explained, I think it is helpful to discuss the mystery of the Holy Trinity through aspects of life we experience. So, let’s take *Time*: We experience time in the present moment, *and* in that present moment we carry our pasts while anticipating the future. The church teaches that whatever is done by one person of the Trinity, in any given moment, is done by all three persons of the Trinity. The Triune God is eternally omnipresent - present in all places at all times.

*So, how does God’s omnipresence bring about our transformation?*Well, consider that the present moment bears both the past and future. In the same way, our experience of Jesus is also an encounter with the Father and the Spirit. And, that the infilling of the Spirit is also an encounter with the Son and the Father. And, to know that the presence of the Father is to know the Son and the Holy Spirit. Right at this present moment we have access to eternity. This is why the mystics say, you will find God here and now or you will not find God at all.

**Thirdly,** the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, as members of the Trinity exist in an eternal and reciprocal relationship of love. This holy community as great implications for humanity, since we’ve all been created in the divine triune image, and this fact is our invitation to participate in that reciprocal relationship of love as well.

When we think about the Trinity, even though we cannot get our minds around it, even though visiting preachers just make it all more confusing, and even though all of our metaphors break down and fail short at some point, we see that in God there is a picture of perfect community. One author puts it this way, “The Christian concept of god as Trinity is the most sublime articulation intimacy, an eternal interflow of friendship.” And “of this community I am and always will be a living member” says the Heidelberg Catechism.

*So, how does this bring about transformation?* This invitation to relationship is the game-changer, because in it: God is for us – through the Father, God is alongside us – in the person of Jesus, and God is within us – by the Holy Spirit. And the mystery of God becomes the very thing that enables, enfolds, and enlivens us. Our human nature comes alive. Our personhood radiates because we are in loving relationship with the fount of all life.

The Christian belief in the Trinity is not merely some philosophical or theoretical doctrine. I wonder if we so desperately want to understand the Trinity because we want to know if we can find belonging in God. In the deepest part of ourselves, we want to be known for who we are and loved beyond what we can ask for, and what we find in God is true Community, true Relationship, true Love that gives of itself, true Belonging and Grace.

Looking back over the liturgical calendar, the events function as a sequence of well-aimed hammer-blows knocking each little false ‘god’ we’ve created for ourselves. The idols of convenience or security, the gods who reinforce our own pride and prejudice. And with each hammer-blow, these idols fall away, revealing instead a very different God. A subversive God, a God who comes to us as one who serves, a God with wounds in his hands, a God who comes to us in wind and fire, in bread and wine, in flesh and blood: a mysterious, eternal God who says to us, ‘You did not choose me; I chose you.’

On this Trinity Sunday, let’s lay down our need to know and our desire to explain, and let’s find our delight in knowing that somehow, the Triune God who defies all our explanations and metaphors has invited us to be a community of worshipping people who proclaim and re-proclaim – in words and actions – the hope of transformation in relationship with God.

*Let’s pray.*

Just as we have known your presence and love in the gift of Father and Son, so, O God, reveal yourself to us in the wonder and power of your Holy Spirit. Pour out this Spirit of love and hope, that we might serve in your world. Keep us faithful in our service to you, that we might give you glory and honor and praise forevermore

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**Benediction**

Go out and in all of life, worship the Lord.

Entrust yourself to the winds of God’s Spirit;

put to death selfish desires,

and offer yourself for God’s mission in the world.

And may God give strength to you and to all;

May Christ Jesus bless you with peace;

And may the Holy Spirit, whispering within your hearts,

...give you assurance that you are God’s children.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,

…In the name of Christ. Amen.