

JN 3:1-7 BELIEVING IN THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY

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Trinity Sunday, June 7, 2009, SJOC

This is a rich time of year for theological discussions. First there is Pentecost, when we attempt to define the Holy Spirit with images of fire igniting in us an urge to say or do something; the dove as graceful, free, peaceful and comforting; and the wind: sudden, motivating and moving us into action.

I remember leading a discussion, rather a brainstorming session, about the Holy Spirit once, when one woman finally raised her hand and asked; “So what is it? Is it a thing? A person?” Good question! One man in the group responded, “I think it’s like electricity. I don’t understand how it works, but I sure know it exists and is very powerful!” I think the best definition we came up with was that the Holy Spirit is God’s movement, God’s life force in the world. Phew! That explains that one!

But then today is Trinity Sunday and if you thought understanding the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was tough, just try explaining the Trinity! God in one: three persons/one being, three beings/one person, made of the same or similar substance? God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit has taken up many a theologians’ time in trying to explain the seemingly unexplainable.

I remember when I was a seminarian at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, we had many deep, theological discussions. Have you ever had an experience where the more you talk about something, the more confused you get? At times our discussions would get so heated, we’d eventually just throw up our hands and say, “It’s a mystery!” Our theology professor caught on real quick and set a rule that we could no longer use the M-word, “Mystery”, until the last five minutes of class!

What difference does God the Trinity make in our lives? Why not just the Father, just the Son or just the Holy Spirit? What kind of meaning do all three in one have? What difference does it make, one or three? Is it simply that the more the better and therefore three is better than one? Or perhaps it's that with three different relations, we humans can choose which one we relate to the most? Just like the Holy Spirit with fire, wind and the dove, choose the one that suits you the best.

I think one of the most helpful things I have learned about the Holy Spirit over the years is that through the Trinity, God lives in community with Godself. And through the Trinity, there is completeness in God. The Father is the creator of heaven and earth, of things seen and unseen, our protector and our shield. The Son is the one perfect image of the Father who shows us God's loving nature. Some people claim Jesus as our mentor. Some others say He is our friend. And then there's the Holy Spirit: God at work in the world, what John reminds us blows where it chooses, you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from or where it goes.

Living in community is not only part of who God is, it is also part of who we are. As human beings, we have been created in the like image and likeness of God. We are not made or intended to live a solitary life. We are all in relation with one another and with God. Unity. In union. In community.

Today in our church we celebrate the send-off four graduating seniors, as well as the Briddells, who will be moving to Madison, WI. Together we have worshipped, explored who God is and how God calls us to serve and be in this world. These members of our church family have left their mark on us and we pray that they will take part of our church family with them. They remind us that the community in which we live is greater than these four walls.

It's easy for us to comprehend living in community in human terms, but when it comes to God living in community as the Trinity, I really want to use that M-word. It's beyond our understanding.

To be honest, sometimes I worry when we try so hard to factualize the mighty works of God, God's relation with creation, or Godself. All of us have heard theories created by human beings that try to explain away miracles like the parting of the Red Sea or the many healings Jesus did. Now I know we live in an age when we want to understand everything, but why can't we just let God be?

When our minds tell us that things about God are impossible, when we still have questions, may our faith gives us the confidence to believe in God's mystery and act in the name of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.