

June 19, 2011  
Echo Hill Presbyterian Church

2Cor 13:11-13  
Matthew 28:16-20

## Practical Mystery

### **Introduction**

Today is Trinity Sunday – a day for us to be reminded that we profess – with the church throughout the ages – that we believe in a God who is one – yet at the same time – we experience this God in three different and particular ways as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit or Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

When we speak of the 3ness and the 1ness of God – we refer to Trinity or to the Triune God or sometimes we just say God – which in this case doesn't refer to God as in Father or Creator but fullness of God – Father, Son, and Spirit.

We have two scripture readings this morning. Both of them come at the end – the first at the end of Matthew's gospel – the second at the end of Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the church in Corinth. Both of them bear witness to the particular or personal ways that we refer to the Triune God. Both of them also call us, in particular ways, to bear our own witness to this Triune.

Our reading from Matthew is often referred to as the Great Commission. The risen Christ has met his disciples in Galilee – and before departing he gives them a job – to go and make disciples of all nations – baptizing and teaching these disciples all that Christ has commanded them.

In our second reading from 2Corinthians, Paul has written the church in Corinth to attempt to heal up some rifts and divisions that seem to have occurred between Paul and the church in Corinth. Paul's language throughout most of this letter is gentle and pastoral – Paul explaining his actions and motives. In a lot of this letter we get a personal glimpse of Paul – the one who holds the treasure of the Good News of what God has done in Jesus Christ – as a clay jar (fragile).

As Paul ends his letter he asks that the community of faith in Corinth – that there be unity and peace with in the community – this unity and this peace is their witness to the Triune God.

### **Prayer**

### **Scripture**

Summer is almost here (June 21). I have found memories of summer time when I was growing up. I grew up on a summer camp where my mom was camp director. Each week for 13 weeks we would have about 160 new friends show up to play with and occupy our time. Each day right after lunch we would have 'siesta'. An hour were we would have to go to our cabin (or in our case our bedrooms) and rest.

It was a time for summer reading. In particular I remember reading mysteries – the Nancy Drew - the Hardy Boys – Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's short stories about the famous fictional detective Sherlock Holmes. I loved the mysteries – the 'who done its' – and maybe you do too.

I did a search on Amazon.com of mysteries and thrillers – and it told me that there were almost 37,000 paperback titles available. Somebody must like mysteries.

Doesn't seem like there are many mysteries left. It seems like every day a new discovery is made that explains away the mysteries of life and living. Things that were once mysterious – a world that appeared flat – a sky that did not fall – the workings of the heavens and the earth – the mystery of the human body – science and math - physics and astronomy – all have worked to uncover mysteries. Yet even as I say this it seems that each new discovery uncovers a new mystery.

I like mysteries – but – truth be told I don't like mysteries that remain mysteries. I don't want to read a book where at the end after I have been working to make sense of pieces and parts of the story that I have been told – I don't want the ending to read – “well we don't really know what happened.”

I want the mystery revealed – the case solved. I want to know ‘who done it’ and how it was done.

When things remain mysterious – there are a few people who go deep – spending years – and whole life times trying to solve the mystery – but most of us simply give up.

The Trinity – this God who is one and who is at the same time three – is a mystery – a mystery that quite frankly few of us think too much about – it is a mystery that we have given over to academia and to theologians.

Yes we say – we believe – we believe in a God who is one and a God who is three but don't ask me what that means – don't ask me how the way I live – what I say and what I do – reflects what I believe about the Triune. The mystery of the Trinity is just that - mystery.

But what if instead of just allowing it to be mystery - a mystery that we have given up on what if we let it be a 'practical' mystery – what if we allowed what we did know about the Trinity to inform the way we live – instead of just giving up on the whole thing.

I don't know much about gravity – but I am sure glad for it. I know that things stay put, held by some kind of mysterious gravitational pull – that it has to do with mass and velocity (right now my engineers and science people are laughing).

I don't know much about the heavens – the stars and the universes. I don't know about black holes – and vortexes – all I know is that I am glad for their beauty – and that when I think about them – about how they go on and on and on – it gives me a sense of smallness – and humility.

I don't know much about how this body works – I get the stuff I can see and feel – but start talking about neurons and body chemistry – and .... What I know is that as the psalmist puts it

we have been ‘marvelously and wonderfully made’ – and I am astounded by what this body can do and what it does each and every day.

When I talk about the Trinity – I am humbled – humbled by what I don’t know. I am humbled by the lack of knowledge and the inability to articulate – how this 1ness and 3ness of God works and what it means to us.

So I am most grateful for the work of others in having a little understanding of the Trinity.

7<sup>th</sup> Century Greek Theologian, John of Damascus developed an understanding of the Trinity referred to as the Perichoresis (Perry-ko-ray’-sis) (Go ahead and say it. Perry-ko-ray’-sis.)

The word itself refers to what it means. Peri (as in perimeter) means around. Choresis means dancing - intentional – choreographed dancing. – The image is of the Father, Son and Spirit like three dancers each moving individually but at the same time in concert with one another.

Theologian Shirley Guthrie says<sup>1</sup> that “...*perichoresis invites us to think in a new way about the very meaning of ‘one’ and ‘personal’.* *The oneness of God is not the oneness of a distinct, self-contained individual; it is the unity of a community of persons who love each other and live together in harmony. And “personal” means by definition inter-personal; one cannot be truly personal alone but only in relation to other persons.*”

This is to say that the trinity is a community of beings – they are not –except what they are together. Each has their own uniqueness – each their own giftedness but those gifts are only realized in the relation of the three. Each is acting in love for the other. Each is making room for the other. Each is bringing out the best of the other. Each is encouraging the other. In this way Trinity is understood not in terms of what each person does – but instead – in the relationship they have with each other.

This makes sense to me.

As I think about the Great Commission and the language of the Trinity contained there – to ‘go and make disciples of all nations – baptizing and teaching’ – I don’t have a sense of some task to be undertaken – some kind of military or militant operation – with maps – and logistic – and...

I mean, if the Trinity is about relationships isn’t this what Jesus is saying to his disciples – *“Go therefore and be in relationship with people everywhere sharing with them your relationship with me in a way that they will be in relationship with me.”*

Isn’t Baptism the way that we officially – ceremonially – welcome people into the family of God. And we do that – baptizing in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – we are reminded that we are to be in relationship with one another in same self-giving way as the Triune God shows us.

Doesn’t Jesus say that we are to show others how to live – in relationship with God and with one another – ‘teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you?’

This makes sense to me. Isn't Paul talking about unity and peace – in our relationships with each other and our God. Doesn't he tell us that bearing witness – by the practical ways in which we live our lives is shown by the ways we emulate the:

Graciousness – the acceptance, the forgiveness, the welcome – of the Lord Jesus Christ

The love – the self-less – self-giving – other serving – love of God the Father

The communion – the deep – significant kind of relationships that bind us together.

We have committed ourselves to be a community of faith that is about relationships – our relationships with our God and others. We have committed ourselves to be a community that bears witness to the Triune God by the way we welcome others – by the ways we care for those we know and especially those we don't know – by the ways we are committed to growing in love of God and others – by the ways we demonstrate the generosity of God in Jesus Christ.

If we do these things in practical ways – we will bear witness to the reality and the mystery of the God who is one and three. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Guthrie, Shirley, Christian Doctrine, Revised Edition, Westminster John Knox, Louisville, KY, 1994 p.91f