

King of Glory Lutheran Church
Holy Trinity Sunday – May 27, 2018
John 3:1-17

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God is beyond our comprehension. Are we comfortable with that mystery? Nicodemus starts with what he knows and Jesus pushes him to grow past that. God doesn't condemn (vs 17) us or our questions. God welcomes them.

Today is Holy Trinity Sunday. One of my colleagues said do not preach on the Holy Trinity. In fact don't even mention the holy Trinity! Because it is a doctrine - that is a formula to describe God, and no one's life has ever been changed by preaching about a doctrine. Furthermore, for many people it is only a formula that gets invoked in worship. 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' Beyond that, it doesn't inspire us, it doesn't change lives and it isn't Gospel – the Good News. So don't preach it!

Well...our youth, when they go to Sky Ranch for camp, take turns leading worship and learn to begin worship as we do – invoking or calling upon our one God in three persons. They make up hand motions. They get creative and I believe it assists them in remembering we do worship One God, in three persons.

So to get our juices going – here is a short video of St. Patrick in Ireland trying to explain the Trinity to two men, Donall and Conall. Yet, every time St. Patrick comes up with an analogy, he runs into a heresy – a teaching of the ancient church that was debunked as untrue. Take a look.

(VIDEO: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8yuDXJB9BI>) The Trinity Explained

St. Patrick finally says the Trinity is explained in the Athanasian Creed - a portion of which you see on the next slide. Lutherans are a creedal church. We profess what we believe in our creeds. Therefore, when we invoke a trinitarian formula for God, we are invoking something that the church has done for centuries upon centuries.

(SLIDE)

This creed like the Apostles and Nicene creeds were written by the early church to describe God. The Athanasian is used very rarely anymore, as it contains the anathemas – the condemnations for those who don't believe it.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athanasian_Creed)

Which just happens to be a lovely jumping off point for Nicodemus' and Jesus' conversation.

We know this story. Nicodemus is a teacher – he is a Jewish leader, a Pharisee. The Pharisees devoted themselves to a strict adherence to the Torah, their Jewish scriptures. He knows what God says in those texts. He followed the Law. Yet Nicodemus also recognizes Jesus teaches

with authority and he performs miracles. So Nicodemus is poised between what he knows and what he doesn't know.

Bless, his heart. Coming in the dark of night, the darkness illustrative of his unknowing, he courageously meets Jesus and begins to talk.

'No one can do what you do, without God's presence...umm. We know you're a teacher.' And what gets left unsaid sounds something like, "Who the heck are you? You don't fit into any of my categories, or rules or understandings about the nature of God and yet you are walking around in flesh and blood and I think you might be God! Maybe? Perhaps? Is it possible? I don't understand!"

What a fabulous place to land! In the presence of God, saying, "I don't understand." For that's when God can teach us the most. If we're open.

My sister is a kindergarten teacher. One day her principal came in needing to speak to her privately. My sister was in the middle of a lesson which she couldn't stop. The scissors lesson. "Open. Shut. Open. Shut." Sara told me the look on the principal's face was one of surprise. It was like, "Really? This is how you spend your time? Open. Shut?" Well, we all have to start with the basics, right?

And once we master basics, we move up in difficulty. Addition and subtraction lead to multiplication and division. After that, I have no idea, as I never got beyond long division!

Jesus says to His adult student, Nick, "Look, you have to allow God to birth you over and over again. To bring you to new understandings, new perceptions, new expansions of your faith and your relationship with God. This is how it really works! God isn't just contained in the books of the Torah. God is a living God who is in relationship with you! God will and can take you anywhere. The wind blows...and blows...and blusters and breezes and whispers your name. Can you hear it Nicodemus?"

"Uhhh...umm...I don't know."

"Precisely!"

"Not understanding is a good thing?"

Yes. Not understanding is helpful. That is counter to what we think, correct? When we know information, that information is like a building block for the next information. We have power when we comprehend, because we understand. When we understand, we can undertake and appreciate, or recognize and grasp, even empathize and identify with. We make decisions with information and data, evidence, facts and figures. One might think without information we have nothing.

Or we have God.

The wind, that Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, will blow where it chooses. You won't see it. You might hear it or feel it.

This communication was mind-boggling for Nicodemus. How could God walk the earth and how could people be born anew when ...when that wasn't physically possible and simply wasn't true?

How comfortable are we with not knowing God? How comfortable are we with allowing God to be God even when we don't understand God's ways or God's will?

What we know about Nicodemus is that he is changed by Jesus. He shows up again in the Gospel. And then again at Jesus' death. He life is changed by the living God who lives and breathes outside of doctrine and creed and even outside of Bible and Sacrament! Poised between what he knows and what he doesn't fathom, God through the Holy Spirit moves this Pharisee to see more, know more, love more, learn more from Jesus.

He might not have been content to show up in the daytime to talk to Jesus, but eventually Nicodemus does come in the daylight. He has grown through his own darkness to come into the light. God's light of understanding.

Think for a few moments how you've come to be knowledgeable about God. Parents. Bible. Prayer. Sunday School teachers. Gramma. Friends. Sacraments of baptism or holy communion. Excellent sources of comprehending God and experiencing God.

Yet what happens when life throws that curve ball we don't expect? And suddenly everything we know about God doesn't seem sufficient to meet our need? To give us answers? To comfort us? Nothing makes sense. Our prayers don't get answered. We don't know where to turn and God's voice isn't even a whisper.

Then...when all our own ability to produce knowledge of God fall short...what happens? We might just feel like we're standing under the star filled sky in a huge desert all alone.

Sometimes we run from God when they come to this edge between knowledge and faith. It's too scary to take that jump and find God in mid air.

At other times we rationalize from what we know to what we don't know. We begin to put our own limited understandings upon God. "God doesn't care about me." "God doesn't have time for me." "God is out to get me."

Hopefully most times, we will not run or rationalize but stop and remember the Good News found in a favorite Psalm. "Be still and know that I am God."

“Be still. Quit trying to know what you know and wait for me. The wind will begin blowing.”

One might think without information we have nothing. Or we have God. Which is all, which is who, God is what we need. If we're open.

God so loved us, God sent us Jesus and Jesus brings light and understanding – even in the middle of the night. And when we remember that truth, the wind will begin to blow...come see me. Come meet me. Out beyond the field of knowing, beyond your sense of right and wrong. Let's talk.

For God didn't send the Son to condemn the world, but to save the world. God doesn't condemn our questions or limited reasoning or emotions, for God lives outside of all of that. We might think we're still at “Open. Shut.” Yet God is ready to teach us to how to cut the paper and even go outside the lines!

When we come in the dark of night, questions ready, cookie cutter answers ready, God begins to blow. “I'm larger than life. I am who I am. I am God. One in three. Mystery. Majesty. Beyond your knowing and yet here because I love you and I will help you believe in me.”

If you remember nothing else from Holy Trinity Sunday, I want you to invite the God you know to learn more about the God you do not know.

Amen.