

Holy Trinity Sunningdale
Sunday May 30, 2021 - Trinity Sunday
Reading – John 3:1-17 Jesus Teaches Nicodemus

A man was seen in church only one Sunday a year. No, he did not attend on Christmas or Easter, but year after year, he came to worship on Trinity Sunday. Finally, the vicar had to ask, "Why is it that you only come to worship on Trinity Sunday?"

"Oh, that's easy to explain," the man said. "I like to come on this day so I can hear the preacher get all tangled up trying to explain the Trinity! I hope you can all see what Rev. Terry is trying to do giving me the sermon on Trinity Sunday!"

In the 4th century, the great theologian, St. Augustine, came to a similar conclusion after he had written over 800 pages, trying to explain the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, he had to admit he could not understand it.

This is his story: "As he walked along the seashore one day, he saw a small boy playing with a seashell. The boy scooped a hole in the sand, filled the shell with water, and poured it into the hole. "What are you doing?" St. Augustine asked. The boy replied, "I'm going to pour the sea into that hole." Then St. Augustine said to himself, "That is what I have been trying to do. Standing at the ocean of infinity, I have attempted to grasp it with my finite mind."

Well, If you have come to worship this morning looking for me to give you a rational and objective description of the one God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I will admit up front that I cannot accomplish that task. I must agree with St. Augustine, that I cannot define the infinite, with my finite mind.

Nevertheless, there are a few things we can learn about our quest to understand God from our reading this morning. John tells us that there was another theologian, a Pharisee and leader of the Jewish people who came to Jesus, seeking understanding. Nicodemus says to Jesus, "We know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." Jesus answered him, saying, "No one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."

I believe Jesus gives us our first clue in trying to understand the mystery of God and his kingdom. Nicodemus is trying to understand from a rational, objective, human perspective. He is seeking to know Jesus, and his relationship to God from the perspective of an observer, from outside of a relationship with Christ.

The truth is, God is infinite, beyond the grasp of our finite minds. I think what Jesus is saying in his conversation with Nicodemus, is that if we truly want to know God, and experience his kingdom, it can only happen as we enter into a relationship with God. True knowledge of God cannot be obtained from an objective distance, as if we were studying science, but only through subjective, intimate knowledge, which comes to us as God embraces us and adopts us into his family.

If we want to know God, we need to be open to the power of God's Spirit, which we receive through our baptism. Whether we were baptized as an infant, or baptized as an adult, it is God's Spirit that calls us into a relationship with himself, and with his church here on earth.

There is little doubt that the words of Jesus, as recorded by John, refer to our baptism as the entry point of our relationship with God. Jesus says, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit." Through our baptism, we receive new birth, become a member of Christ's church, and are empowered by God's Spirit to grow in our understanding of God and his kingdom.

The Spirit of God not only works in us as individuals to know God's identity, but it also works through the church, to uplift and proclaim the saving grace of God. The kingdom of God is in reality a community of people who are uplifted and inspired as they seek God's kingdom. What a joy that our community is named Holy Trinity!

In ****Lectio 365** of Wednesday May 12, titled Kingdom Adventure, the reading of 2 parables about the kingdom of heaven is followed with this explanation. "To find the riches of the kingdom ... I must be willing to actively search and I must be willing to sacrificially relinquish all I consider mine, so that I can receive something immensely more valuable!"

Finally, our reading tells us that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life." This says to me and you that God loves us, and will do whatever he can to embrace us as his own! Even though I may not be able to explain the doctrine of the Trinity, any more adeptly than you can, I believe it! I believe it because I have experienced it, through my years of belonging to Christ's Church. God remains a mystery, but thanks be to God for what he has revealed to us, through the power of his Spirit.

I wonder where you find yourself in the kingdom adventure today. Are you searching? Are you sacrificing? Or are you celebrating the valuable riches of the kingdom of heaven?

Today, I pray that our Trinitarian God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who knows each of us intimately and loves us unconditionally will meet us in our searching, in our sacrificing and help us to praise him as we experience more of the goodness of his love and presence. Amen.

Dolapo Ogunbawo

*Charles R. Leary, Mission Ready, C.S.S. Publishing Co., 1990

** Lectio 365 Morning Wednesday May 12, 2021, Kingdom Adventure