

John 3:1-17
Romans 8:12-17

EXPERIENCING THE HOLY

A friend of mine sent me this story: So we were lying on our backs on the grass in the park next to our hamburger wrappers, my fourteen-year-old son and I, watching the clouds loiter overhead, when he asked me, “Dad, why are we here?” And this is what I said: “I’ve thought about it, son, and I don’t think it’s all that complicated. I think maybe we’re here just to teach a kid how to bunt or eat sunflower seeds without using his hands. We’re here to pound the steering wheel and scream as we listen to the game on the radio, 20 minutes after we pulled into the garage. We’re here to look all over, give up, and then find the ball in the hole. We’re here to wear our favorite sweat-soaked Boston Red Sox cap, torn Slippery Rock sweatshirt, and the Converse sneakers we lettered in on a Saturday morning with nowhere we have to go and no one special we have to be with. We’re here to tie the perfect fly, make the perfect cast, catch absolutely nothing, and still call it a perfect morning. We’re here to nail a yield sign with an apple core from half a block away. We’re here to win the stuffed bear or go broke trying.

“I don’t think the meaning of life is gnashing our bicuspid over what comes after death but tasting all the tiny moments that come before it. We’re here to be there when our kid has three goals and an assist. And especially when he doesn’t. I don’t think we’re here to make SportsCenter. The really good stuff never does. Like finding ourselves with a free afternoon, a little red 327 fuel-injected Corvette convertible, and an unopened map of Vermont’s backwoods. None of us will find ourselves on our deathbeds saying, ‘I wish I’d spent more time on the Hibblings account.’ We’re going to say, ‘That scar? I got that scar stealing a home run from Consolidated Plumbers.

“See, grown-ups spend so much time doggedly slaving toward the better car, the perfect house, the big day that will finally make them happy, when happy just walked by wearing a bicycle helmet two sizes too big for him. We’re not here to find a way to heaven. The way is heaven. Does that answer your question, son?”

And he said, “Not really, Dad.” And I said, “No?” And he said, “No, what I meant was, why are we *here* when Mom said to pick her up 40 minutes ago?” (Copied)

“Why are we here?” One answer is that God has called us and brought us all together this morning. We are here in grateful response to God and we desire to love God and worship God as best we can. Most of our worship focuses on what God has done for us through biblical events such as the incarnation whereby Jesus, the Son, took on human flesh and dwelled among us, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Jesus’ death on the cross, Easter and our risen Lord, and Pentecost, the gift of God’s Spirit and the birthday of the Church.

On this Trinity Sunday, however, we worship and celebrate a doctrine and not an event. While Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are the world’s three great monotheistic religions (that believe in one God), Christianity is crucially different from the other two in that while we also affirm one God, we believe that God is expressed in three ways - or, as the opening hymn proclaims: “God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!” In the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and many other places, we affirm one God, who is manifested or revealed in three distinct ways as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

While the word *Trinity* never appears in scripture, the Trinitarian concept is found in the lesson from Romans 8 (the Gospel of John, chapter three, wherein Jesus discussed matters of faith with Nicodemus), and in many other passages in the New Testament. Jesus didn't try to explain the Trinity. He simply referred to the three persons in the Godhead as if his disciples understood what he was talking about. And, in time (after Pentecost), Peter, Paul, and the other disciples talked openly about God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The disciples couldn't fully explain the mystery of the Trinity. Nevertheless, they knew that it was a fact based on their own experiences with God.

Isn't the same true for us as modern day disciples of Jesus Christ? We may not be able to fully plumb the depths and explain completely the mystery of the Triune God, but we can, and we have, experienced the Lord our God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

When I walk my dog in the cool of the morning and listen to the birds or gaze upon a beautiful sunset, when I was baptized and named a beloved child of God, when I contemplate that God knew me before God ever formed me in my mother's womb, when I receive my daily bread and so much more, when I have peace in my soul (even in the midst of problems), when I know that I am loved and valued by God (to name just a few experiences), then **I give thanks to God the Father.**

When I grew up knowing that Jesus loves the little children of the world (red and yellow black and white, all are precious in his sight), when I remember that he stepped down from heaven and took on human flesh so he could be with us and for us, when I recall his teachings and they inspire me or comfort me, when I see how Jesus welcomes all and makes them feel at home in his presence (including me!), when I sincerely confess my sins and I know, without a shadow of a doubt, that Christ died for me and I am forgiven, when I believe that the tomb was empty and Christ is risen and alive and that we have new, abundant, and eternal life in him on *both sides* of the grave (to name just a few experiences), then **I give thanks to God the Son.**

When I am still and know that God is with me, within me, and that I am never, ever alone, when I remember that I have been given gifts for ministry and service in the church and community, when I am led deeper and deeper into the truth about God (and/or myself), when I'm not sure how to pray but I know the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words, when I am led to grow and mature as a disciple of Jesus, when I am moved to reconcile with a brother or a sister (to name just a few experiences), then **I give thanks to God the Holy Spirit.**

Sometimes, I may not realize whether I am experiencing God's grace as coming from the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit; but, if I simply give thanks to God, I have covered all the bases and I have given praise where praise is due.

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that we cannot fully explain to our own or anyone else's satisfaction. St. Augustine, one of the most astute thinkers the Christian Church has ever produced, was walking along the seashore one day while pondering the doctrine of the Trinity. He seemed to hear a voice saying, "Pick up one of the large sea shells there by the shore." So he picked it up. Then the voice said, "Now pour the ocean into the shell." And he said, "Lord, I can't do that." And the voice answered, "Of course not. In the same way, how can your small, finite mind ever hold and understand the mystery of the eternal, infinite, triune God?"

While we can't explain the Trinity, the one God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, certainly has encountered us throughout our lives. Soon, we will experience the

holy as we recognize “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,” who bids us to come and sup with him at Table this morning. And, as we respond to God’s grace, it is the Holy Spirit, who fills us, equips and empowers us, and draws us closer to God and each other. As we continue to experience the Holy One in our lives, may we give glory to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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