

Title: The Wonder and Awe of a Trinitarian God

Subtitle: Exploring the limits of our imagination

Video URL: <https://youtu.be/oNXS55y7Ptk>

Introduction: Today is Trinity Sunday, a day the Church sets aside on the First Sunday after Pentecost to affirm the most fundamental doctrine of Christianity: The Trinity—that God, who is one, has one being and one nature, but is revealed to us as three distinct “persons,” Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

If you find yourself pondering in amazement what this doctrine of God means to you and me, then you are in good company. Throughout Church history, this concept has raised innumerable questions. The Apostle Paul said it best when he wrote, “*Without any doubt, great is the mystery of godliness.*”¹

Our Gospel today is a prime example of just how difficult it is to comprehend spiritual realities. A religious ruler named Nicodemus came to Jesus asking questions about things that he, as a ruler and teacher in Israel, didn’t understand. When Jesus talked about the necessity of being born again or being born from above, Nicodemus skeptically asked, “**How can this be?**”² He wanted to understand what Jesus was talking about but was limited by what he could humanly rationalize. When Jesus speaks about heavenly things, we, too, are limited.

If God is infinite, then it is entirely reasonable that he cannot be fully comprehended by finite minds. Evelyn Underhill, an English Anglo-Catholic writer known for her eloquent works on religion and spiritual practice, once commented, “A god that is small enough to be understood is not big enough to be worshipped.” This is why we need to our limited imagination expanded through the gift of faith.

Last Sunday, we celebrated the giving of the Holy Spirit, who came down upon the disciples “*...to teach them and to lead them into all truth; uniting peoples of many tongues in the confession of one faith.*”³

¹ 1 Timothy 3:16

² John 3:9

³ Words taken from the Proper Preface for Holy Eucharist for Pentecost, see BCP, p. 380

Spiritual realities, like that of the Trinity, can be received and appreciated as the Holy Spirit “...*takes the things of Jesus and begins to show them to us.*”⁴ We need his help because human reason is limited and even blind when it comes to these things. The Apostle Paul alluded to this when he wrote about a veil that covers unbelievers' hearts, but then he wrote, “*But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.*”⁵

I like the way one little fellow expressed it. He was part of a Sunday School class in which the children were told to choose a Bible character they would most like to be and tell why. A little girl wanted to be Mary because she was the mother of Jesus; one young boy wanted to be Joseph because he was Jesus' father and worked in a carpenter's shop; another David, because he was strong and brave and slew Goliath; and yet another Jonah, because he went for a ride in a whale!

One quiet, young man chose to be “Lo.” When told there wasn't a character called “Lo” in the Bible, he replied, “Oh yes, there is. Jesus said, ‘Lo, I will be with you always!’”

That little boy was not exactly right, but he was on to something. Isaiah tells us that although God lives in a high and holy place, he also “...*dwells with those who are contrite and humble in spirit.*”⁶

Therefore a posture of humility is a prerequisite for faith. J.D. Greear, a present-day theologian and pastor of one of the fastest-growing churches in America wrote:

“until we see ourselves for how small and dependent we are, and God for how glorious and awesome he is, we won't be prepared even to ask the right questions, much less receive right answers. Faith in God, which leads to a reverent submission to his will, is rooted in our understanding of how glorious the God who is speaking really is.”⁷

⁴ John 16:14 When the Spirit of truth comes, “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

⁵ 2 Corinthians 3:16

⁶ Isaiah 57:15

⁷ Quote from J.D. Greear's book, Not God Enough: Why Your Small God Leads to Big Problems

The Trinity of God —Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a doctrine that is meant to leave us in awe of God with an appreciation of his greatness. Fortunately for us, though He is very big, he has proven himself willing to become very small – as small as we are—when he humbled himself to become a human in the person of Jesus Christ. As a man, he was subject to hunger and thirst, aggression, hostility, and tragedy. This tells me God feels, He empathizes, and He cares about my pains. And that encourages me when I hurt. God understands when my cross gets heavy, or when I am feeling misunderstood, or feeling that I have been forsaken. It’s because he knows exactly what I am going through I can turn to him, trust him, and obey him.

A Gospel songwriter said it best in a hymn entitled, “Somebody Bigger Than You and I.”⁸ The words go,

Who made the mountains? Who made the trees?

Who made the rivers flow to the sea?

And who sends the rain when the earth is dry?

Somebody bigger than you and I

Who made the flowers to bloom in the Spring?

Who made the song for the robins to sing?

And who hung the moon and the stars in the sky?

Somebody bigger than you and I

He lights the way when the road is long

He keeps you company

And with His love to guide you

He walks beside you

Just like He walks with me.

This love was made possible when Jesus “...*stretched out his arms of love on the hardwood of the cross so that everyone might come within the reach of his saving embrace.*”⁹ When Jesus stretched out his hands out on the cross, he was saying, “I

⁸ Songwriters: Burke J Francis / Lange Johnny / Heath Hy

⁹ Words from the third collect for mission, BCP, p. 101

love you so much it hurts. I love you so much I would rather die than live without you.” Those nails that went into the palms of his hands went straight into the heart of God. Those wounds tell us that if “...*God did not spare his Son, but gave him up for us all, how much more will he freely give us all things.*”¹⁰ It also means that his almighty power can lift us above the pain, worry and doubt that often veil the reality of his presence in our lives.

The last stanza of that same hymn eloquently expresses this thought:

*When I am weary, filled with despair
Who gives me courage to go on from there?
And who gives me faith that will never die
Somebody bigger than you and I*

Our God knows our deepest heartaches and fears. And just as parents long for their children to know and trust their love for them, God wants to be known lovingly and intimately by us so that we can come to know Him and trust Him in all of his fullness—the fullness of the love that has existed in God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all eternity. Amen.

Reflection Questions

- How does the Trinitarian reality as expressed in Paul’s benediction, “*The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,*”¹¹ inspire you to live more confidently?
- How should this knowledge affect the way you live and view your Christian community?

¹⁰ Romans 8:

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 13:14