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The First Sunday after Pentecost

The Holy Trinity

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The Triune God Blesses His People

Today we focus our worship on the Holy Trinity. All Christians confess the truth that there is one God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God reveals to us in the Bible how we benefit from the triune nature he possesses. In that way, this special Sunday is no different from any other Sunday. It simply shines the spotlight on the indescribable blessings we receive every time we gather in the name of our Lord, our triune God.

Sermon

Genesis 1:1 – 2:3

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

[In the Genesis account, the creations on days two to six follow.]

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." ²⁹ Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰ And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so. ³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

Introduction – When I don't understand something, I get a little worried. I filled out my first W-2 form in 1977 and didn't have a clue what I was doing. I wondered if the IRS was going to come and get me. I don't know if that kind of thing bothers you or not. You watch the battle over raising the national debt ceiling the last couple of weeks and you have no idea how politicians do things in Washington. You get a little worried. I know nothing about artificial intelligence—so-called AI—but I've been hearing that it could destroy the world's work force and that concerns me. None of us knows what a nuclear war would be like, but as long as Putin controls Russia—well, that bothers me. We can usually handle stuff we understand, but when we don't understand something, life gets a little scary. The comforting thing is that somebody somewhere understands all these things.

The Holy Trinity is an unknowable mystery. There are experts who know about tax forms and politics and AI and Vladimir Putin, but not even experts understand the Trinity. Jesus called us to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit but he doesn't say more than that. He talked to his followers about the Father who sent him and the Spirit he would send, but he doesn't provide details. The Bible mentions the concept of the Trinity in hundreds of passages, but there is no one passage or chapter or book that lays out the doctrine in a concise and complete way. The church invented the words Trinity and triune; those words aren't in the Bible. People try to symbolize the Trinity—the shamrock, the triangle, three interlocking circles. The three great confessions of the Christian Church all focus on the Trinity, but even after we confess them and study them, there are still questions. I mean, how do you explain this from the Athanasian Creed: “For just as Christian truth compels us to confess each person individually to be God and Lord, so the true Christian faith forbids us to speak of three Gods or three Lords.” There are some things about himself that God explains, but there are other things he does not explain. The Holy Trinity is one of those things. The Holy Trinity is an unknowable mystery.

We don't understand the Holy Trinity and, really, we can't understand it. Does that scare you? Do you worry about it? Probably not, but maybe it should. To believe in a God we absolutely cannot comprehend in any way, shape, or form is at least intimidating. More likely we just don't think about it too much. We don't think much about the ink theologians have spilled to explain the Trinity or the battles churches have waged to defend the Trinity or the martyrs who died confessing the Trinity. We don't think much about the people close by us who deny the Trinity: Jewish folks on Mequon Road, Unitarians on Port Road, Jehovah's Witnesses on Donges Bay Road, Christian Scientists in Cedarburg, Mormons in Granville. We don't really need to be scared of the Holy Trinity, but we do need to value it and trust it.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. In the very first words of Genesis chapter 1 we find the Bible's first reference to the Holy Trinity. There's no lengthy confession here, no precise explanation; the term Trinity isn't mentioned. But the Trinity is here, and right from the start of history we learn and we can believe that

The Holy Trinity Is an Unknowable Mystery with Unlimited Love

The Apostles' Creed which is the oldest of our Christian confessions, has three articles. The First Article confesses the Father Almighty, the Second confesses Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord, and the Third confesses the Holy Spirit. Our catechism talks about the First Article of Creation, the Second Article of Redemption, and the Third Article of Sanctification. Those are good teaching tools but we can come

away with the impression that the three persons of the Trinity have their own separate categories of work--that the Father creates alone and the Son redeems alone and the Spirit sanctifies alone. But it isn't as simple as that. Moses tells us in Genesis that **the Spirit of God was hovering over the water**. Psalm 104 presents a long list of created things, and then the psalm writer wrote, **When you send your Spirit, they are created and you renew the face of the earth**. Moses tells us that the creation came from the voice of God: **And God said, and God said, and God said**—the phrase is repeated ten times in Genesis 1. So what are we to think when St. John wrote: **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made**. At the very beginning of time, at the launch of the universe, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit were present, involved, and creating.

When the Holy Trinity began the work of creation there was nothing around except a disorganized blob of earth and water and it was suspended in darkness. Moses tells us it was **formless and empty**. There was no light because God does not need light to exist. There was no time; God's existence is infinite. So, God created light and then he added the element of time: light for the day, darkness for the night. He created the passing of time: evening and morning. He created the counting of time: the first day, the second day, the third day.

There was nothing there. God is self-sufficient; he needs nothing to exist. So, God began filling the earth: he dried up some of the ground and formed it and he organized some of the water and controlled it. Then vegetation on day three, then the solar system on day four, then fish and birds on day five, then animals on day six. All this God did: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. It is all an unknowable mystery.

The greatest and grandest part of the creation mystery is that the Holy Trinity did all this for us. **Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness. So God created mankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them**. When God created the heavens and the earth and everything in it, he created them for these human creatures. **Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground**. Of everything God created, we humans are the crown. We are different from earth that scatters by wind or oceans that retreat by tides. We are different from seeds that germinate by water and sun; we are different from animals that live by instinct and impulse. We are human creatures and we reason and speak and act in ways other creatures do not. And the human creatures God created were as perfect as God. Not as strong, not as wise, but just as perfect and just as eternal. God created the Tree of Life for them so they could live forever.

I can't explain to you how or why God did all this; no one can. But the story of the creation of helps us to know and believe that the Holy Trinity, while an unknowable mystery, works in unlimited love. The universe that surrounds us, the stars that guide us, the sun that warms us, the atmosphere that protects us, the rain that sustains us, the crops that feed us, the living creatures that nourish us, the beauties of earth that amaze us, and the little joys that amuse us come to us from God's unlimited love. The eyes we see with, the ears we hear with, the mouths we eat with, the noses we smell with, the lungs we breathe with, the hands we work with, the fingers we control with, the hearts we live with, everything that is part of us comes to us because of God's unlimited love. The Father, the Son,

and the Holy Spirit were all involved in those magnificent six days; the Father created, the Son created, the Holy Spirit created. An unknowable mystery but unlimited love.

Then came Satan and then came sin. Creation remained but it was battered and butchered by Satan and sin. Worse yet, the image of God was lost. Adam and Eve were not perfect anymore and they fell under the curse of death. But God was still there. He was there with a plan to restore the image and create a new heaven and a new earth. He was there with a resolve to set aside his glory and take our place on the cross. He was there with his subtle power to set us apart as the renewed people of God. All this God did for us and does for us. Why did he? How could he? Why would he? An unknowable mystery but unlimited love.

With the Holy Trinity there is no need to be scared of what you don't understand. There is a need to believe and confess. There is a need to assess and adore. There is a need to sing: "Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a tribute far too small. Love so mazing, so divine, demands my life, my soul, my all." Amen.