

“Mystery and Ministry” Matt. 28:16-20. Hope 6/7/20
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In the liturgical calendar, this Sunday been set aside to **celebrate the mystery of the Holy Trinity. We worship one God, but we are not unitarians.** Our God has revealed himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit...three distinct persons, but one God. In the early years of my ministry it was traditional to recite the Athanasian Creed rather than the Apostle's or Nicene creeds in worship. This creed was written in the 4th century as the church attempted to clarify its position regarding the nature of God. Let me read a brief portion for you.....

The catholic faith is this, that we worship that we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance. The Father is one person, the Son is another, the Holy Spirit another...etc

It goes on for two solid pages in this fashion. Do you find this helpful? Is it all now clear in your mind? You understand? I confess to being a little facetious. Of course you do not understand. It is a mystery, But **please understand that this really IS extremely important.** Church history is filled with all sorts of heresies and theological distortions which emerge when one person of the Trinity is accented and another diminished. As it is, there a far too many functional “2nd person unitarians” in churches today. Jesus, Jesus, only Jesus...thank you, Jesus. Then, of course, there are also 3rd person unitarians...it's all about the Spirit and the special gifts of the Spirit..But at the end of the day, we still must confess that it is all a great mystery to be worshiped, not comprehended. How dare we think we can cram and shove the nature of God into the confines of a human brain.

Today's Gospel text is chosen, rather obviously, because it is the single passage of the Bible that most clearly articulates the three persons of Holy Trinity..” *Go, disciple nations and baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”.* Nowhere else in the Bible is the Trinity stated that succinctly...that authoritatively, from the mouth of Jesus himself.

But we should note that this is spoken NOT in the context of some philosophical discussion about the nature of God. Jesus didn't gather his disciples for a last minute seminar about the distinguishing characteristics of his Father, Himself and the Spirit so that after his ascension they would be able to clearly communicate this fine point of Christian doctrine. No, He gathered them to send them into the world. He commissioned them, not to sit with the wise, the theologians, pondering and reflecting on the nature of God... but to make disciples...to share

the Good News of a God that so loved the world that He sent his only Son, Jesus, to redeem that world, to pay for their transgressions with his own blood, and to ratify and communicate that cleansing redemption with water baptism, placing the strong name of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, upon every disciple of Jesus. But again, **the context, the focus is upon our task, our commission, our ministry. We are people sent!**

We find ourselves in a very unusual place as we think about our commission, our ministry. Because of a pandemic, you are viewing this service on an electronic device. I am preaching to an near empty building.. a lovely building dedicated for the praise and worship of the Holy Trinity. We are all accustomed to gathering here regularly to pray, praise and give thanks. We call it “going to church”. We are learning, the hard way, that this is wonderful privilege. But you understand, **the Bible never once calls a building the Church.** A little VBS song teaches us...”*I am the Church, You are Church, We are the Church together.*” Wherever we are scattered out there, in homes, in assisted living facilities...we are the Church. The Church is people, a special people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation called out of darkness into his marvelous light! A people sent..commissioned. We gather here in normal times only to scatter! As we say it every Sunday... *the worship is ended, the service begins...* the ministry begins. The Church gets to work in the world.

And it is a **hurting world.. a world filled with anxiety and fear.** Once again we experience the by-products of prejudice and racial animosity, injustice and hatred, all this storming violence...and this against the backdrop of Covid -19, an unseen enemy that penetrates every little bubble of our imagined security. There are some who try to make light of it, flaunting their freedom, crowing about their rights,” no mask for me,”,, but I daresay that everyone of us has given more thought to our mortality, our vulnerability, the fragile nature of life in these last three months than we have in years! You can’t snatch 100,000 people out of our nation without it getting our attention. 30 million people out of work. **People are hurting. People are lonely and afraid. People are hungry. People are in despair.**

It’s a time and place for the Church, God’s special people, to reveal who they are and what they believe. **We can’t wait until we come back to church to BE the Church!**

I’m reminded that the **Chinese symbol of the word for CRISIS is a combination of the symbols for DANGER and OPPORTUNITY.** What an opportunity we now have to communicate something of what it means to be Church.. people who live in the light,” This little light of mine, I’m going to let it shine!” It is a most

opportune time for the scattered Church to give witness, in word and deed, that we are People who live by faith, filled with a hope and a confidence that cannot be destroyed by a virus or any other threat.... people who understand that there is more to this life than the accumulation of material goods...people who live as stewards of all their God-given resources...so if there are hungry we feed them..if there are hurting people we comfort them, if there are hopeless, despairing people we share with them the *reason for the hope within us*...that we are children of the heavenly Father who will never leave us or forsake us,,,we are forgiven sinners with sure confidence that even if this virus would take us from this life we would, in the blink of an eye be transported to a glory that is beyond imagination. **We can't wait until we come back to church to BE the Church. We dare not!**

It is the opportune time for us to remind ourselves and somehow communicate to our neighbors that our **Father's modus operandi, his pattern of behavior, is to turn evil into good...** to take what appears to be a disastrous situation and turn it into blessing..You find that hard to believe? Illustration ? **Talk to Daniel**, sitting in a lion's den...talk **to Jonah** in the belly of whale ... talk to **Joseph**, plucked out of pit and sold to slave traders on their way to Egypt.....talk to **Job**, mourning the loss of his wife and children and scratching his boils.. .. talk **to Lazurus**, unwrapping his grave clothes....talk to frightened, **devastated disciples** huddled in a locked room when their whole world had been turned upside down..talk to **Thomas**..talk to dejected disciples on the road to Emmaus....**Look at the cross**, the greatest tragedy in all of human history.. **You know the outcome of all those events..**They are all **reflections of God's specialty, God's modus operandi, turning evil into good.** This is the way our God works among us...

We don't know the full outcome of this strange new world we are living in, but we know the One who stands with us, providing us Light in a dark place and equipping us to share the light with a hurting, anxious world...the One who has revealed himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit... The strong name of Holy Trinity.
To Him be all the glory.. Amen.