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John 14:15-21, 25-27
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$$1 + 1 + 1 = ???$$

Okay, how about we start with a little fun and games? Anybody like brain teasers? I have three I want to try on you.

First, if a red house is made from red bricks. A blue house is made from blue bricks. A yellow house is made from yellow bricks. What is a green house made from?

Glass

Here's another easy one. Each child in a family has at least 3 brothers and 3 sisters. What is the smallest number of children the family might have?

Everyone should come up with 8, right?

Okay, this last one may be a bit tougher. Three people check into a hotel. They pay \$30 to the manager and go to their room. The manager suddenly remembers that the room rate is \$25 and gives \$5 to the bellboy to return to the people.

On the way to the room the bellboy reasons that \$5 would be difficult to share among three people so he pockets \$2 and gives \$1 to each person.

Now each person paid \$10 and got back \$1. So, they now have paid \$9 each, totaling \$27. The bellboy has \$2, totaling \$29. Where is the missing \$1?

Each person paid \$9, totaling \$27. The manager has \$25 and the bellboy has \$2. The bellboy's \$2 should be added to the manager's \$25 or subtracted from the tenants' \$27, not added to the tenants' \$27.

So, what was this supposed to demonstrate? Well, I hope it demonstrated the human nature to be inquisitive. We like to try to figure things out. Especially us guys.

Our wives present us with a problem, and our first inclination is to figure out a solution. Problem, solution. That is way life is supposed to work. Right?

Our natural propensity is to do the same thing with God. We think we have to figure God out before we can trust him. And there's the rub!

At the very heart of Christian spirituality there is a notion called "the Trinity."

It's so central, that one of the greatest theologians of the 20th century, Karl Barth, went so far as to propose that, "Trinity is the Christian name for God."

Mind you, he wasn't talking about a character in *The Matrix* (that should take some of you back a ways), but the very essence of God.

God is a Trinity of three-in-one, co-equal and yet distinct, called the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The concept of the Trinity is not simple. But, if you think about it, though, most of reality isn't simple either.

For instance, every one of the trillions of cells in your body is incredibly complex.

Family relationships are complicated. Women are complex. I still have trouble figuring out my \$20 digital alarm clock.

And yet, for some reason, when it comes to God or Bible study or spirituality we want simple answers; we don't want to think.

But do we really want a God who is less mysterious than an alarm clock?

Today is Trinity Sunday, the only Sunday marked in the Christian year where the focus is on a doctrine rather than an event or a specific teaching of Jesus.

This doctrine of the Holy Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—is a mystery that theologians have pondered for centuries.

And truth-be-told, God is pretty much a mystery if you think about it.

I can't touch him.

I can't say how big he is, because I don't know what to measure.

I can't see him. If I wanted to take a photo of God, I don't know where to point the camera.

I can't knock on his door and have morning tea (I don't like coffee) with God at his home.

I can't always feel the presence of God, because I'm never too sure if I am only feeling my own emotions.

I can't imagine what God is like, because I always end up using human pictures, giving him human qualities so that he makes sense to my small human mind.

I can't think like God, because if I could, I would be able to understand why a young mother had to die, why thousands of people die in earthquakes, why a baby is severely disabled.

We often think about God as a bigger and more powerful version of us.

Some even view God as having the same lusts and emotions as we have.

Others view God as a nameless being, playing with us in the same way as a cat plays with a mouse.

What has happened is that people have fashioned God after their own likeness.

As humans, we are restricted to describing God with earthly terminology and so can only express what God is like in the vaguest of terms and left guessing what we have missed.

This is the mystery of God, the great God, the only God who is three persons in one God, who refuses to be categorized, who is far bigger and greater than we could ever imagine.

Episcopal priest and former seminary dean, Gary Hall, calls Trinity Sunday, “the preacher’s graveyard,” and says he used to tell graduating students that, when they got ordained, “they should avoid this Sunday like the plague.”

This is hazardous territory, since through the centuries people have actually lost careers, property, even their lives because of a perceived heresy about the notoriously abstract and esoteric idea of the Trinity.

I’m pretty sure I have nothing to worry about, though. I doubt any pitchfork-wielding theologians have found their way here this morning.

So where did this doctrine of the Holy Trinity come from, you may ask?

Well, not from a bunch of theologians who sat around with nothing better to do.

The doctrine was developed as a means to describe how the One God, in whom we believe, relates to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And it was formed out of argument.

A fellow named Marcion, in the Second Century, taught that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament were two different gods.

God, in the Old Testament, was harsh, cruel, and full of wrath and judgment ... and smiting!

Jesus (the New Testament God), on the other hand, was kind, gentle and loving.

Therefore, we should reject the God of the Old Testament and believe in the God of the New Testament - Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, there was another guy named Arius, who taught that Jesus was not really God, but rather a lesser god created by God the Father to be a mediator between heaven and earth.

Both were deemed heresies and heretics.

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity was formulated by the early church leaders, in part, over and against such heresies, to describe the basic belief in God as three persons, each co-equal, co-eternal, but one in essence and substance.

You got that, right? Three persons, one God! That makes sense!???

The mysteriousness of God, though, is the whole point behind the doctrine of the Trinity.

The doctrine does not define God, but it does describe what God has allowed us to know of Himself.

It will always remain a mystery because God will always be a mystery – at least in this life anyway.

I am reminded of the words of Paul writing to the Christians at Corinth:

Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God knows me now.

1 Corinthians 13:12

That being said, all kinds of smart people have still developed analogies to try to explain how God can be three-in-one:

God is like the spring that flows into the stream that flows in the lake (*that was according to the church father Anselm*).

God is like a plant, with the Father as the deep root, the Son as the shoot that breaks into the earth, and the Spirit who flowers forth to spread beauty and fragrance (*according to the church father Tertullian*).

That God is a Trinity of love, means that God is the lover, the beloved and love itself, all at the same time (*according to St. Augustine*).

Then there is *The Shack*. Several years ago, an interesting book titled *The Shack* became a bestseller. It was later made into a movie.

The story was compelling, but one aspect of that book sparked discussion and disagreement among Christians.

William Paul Young, the author, represented the Trinity in a very unique way.

For God the Father, Young portrayed God as a large black woman, who was outgoing, warm-hearted, and kind.

For God the Holy Spirit, Young's persona was that of an Asian woman dressed in bright colors who seemed to dart in and out of sight in a Tinkerbell-like fashion.

For Jesus, the author portrayed Jesus as a young middle-eastern workman, complete with jeans, flannel shirt, and toolbelt.

Each of these personas of God exhibited unique characteristics, and each had a specific role to play in the fictional story.

Personally, I loved the multi-cultural, gender bending, multi-racial flavor.

Yet all these pictures of the Trinity eventually break down. Ultimately, it is beyond rational thinking, but that doesn't mean it's irrational.

We can't fully understand the concept of the Trinity, but that doesn't make it nonsensical.

So, if we can't fully understand it, why do we even care? The reason we should care about the Trinity, and be aware of the uniqueness of the One-in-Three and Three-in-One is this:

Without a balanced view of all three persons of the Trinity, we can misinterpret the work of God in this world.

For instance, if we emphasize some aspects of God in the Old Testament, and subordinate Jesus and the Spirit, then we come away with a picture of a god of wrath and judgment, who has little compassion.

If we emphasize the person of Jesus, to the exclusion of God the Father and the Holy Spirit, we miss out on the fact that God sent Jesus because “God so loved the world...”

Finally, if we emphasize the Holy Spirit, and the charismatic experiences and gifts of the Spirit, it is easy to lose sight of God as Creator, Son as Redeemer, and the role that the Holy Spirit played and plays in both of those aspects of God’s work.

Too often, people think that God can be put into a neat little package that they can understand and that they control.

That’s not how it works. We don’t understand God completely, if ever, and we sure don’t control him.

So, ONE + ONE + ONE = ONE is still pretty much a mystery.

That being said, the doctrine of the Trinity does tell us about some important things about God – things that are life changing.

Who is God? He is our heavenly Father who made us, takes cares of us and calls us his dear children.

Who is God? He is Jesus Christ who gave his life on the cross to re-establish our relationship with God. He reveals the way to God and to eternal life.

Who is God? God is the Spirit in you giving you faith in God and guiding you in your daily walk as a Christian.

Faith in the Triune God acknowledges the might and majesty of God, but at the same trusts in a God who cares.

I have met many Christians over the years who have been puzzled by the idea of a Triune God, some even to the point of saying that they find it impossible to believe.

But I don't think articulating the doctrine of the Trinity will be one of the essay questions on the exam we take when we get to the Pearly Gates. (actually, I don't think there will be any essay questions – just multiple choice!)

So, what are we to do with this doctrine of the Holy Trinity?

I want us to be reminded every time we hear about it or ponder it that the Good News is that not that we have God all figured out, but that God has us figured out.

And you know what? He loves us anyway, and he forgives our sins in spite of everything he knows about us.

I want us also to be reminded that our journey of life is not one in which all the mysteries of life will be solved.

But, one in which we know that God is behind us, ahead of us, and beside us, leading us to the day in heaven when all the mysteries will be

revealed, and all the doctrines of the church will be meaningless in the presence of God Himself.

God is a party of love, and you're invited into the party. Jesus the Son has opened the door, the Father stands ready to embrace you, and the Spirit is there to guide you.

That'll preach!

Amen...