Sermon

Trinity Year C

16/6/19

Eltham

**Readings**

**OT:** Proverbs 8 woman wisdom

**NT:** Romans 5:1-5

**Gospel:** John 16:12-15

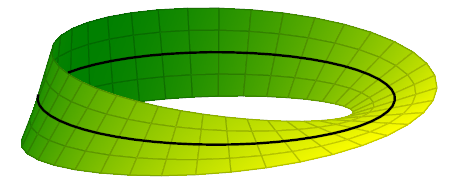
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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiN6Ag5-DrU>

We've just watched mystery: the mystery of the vastness of our universe—what we can observe of it… Is there an edge to the universe? Is the universe infinite? What we do know is that space is expanding, and we know that what we can observe of the universe is about 13.74 billion years old. The further objects are from us in space, the further back in time they are, and the faster they are moving away from us. In other words, what we see now, the light that reaches us from the furthest galaxies in the universe, tells us where those galaxies were 13.735 billion years ago or so ago. There are lots of mysteries about our universe: the fact that we know there's more to the universe than matter—we know there are must be things as dark matter and anti-matter, though no one has ever been able to observe them. For all that scientists and cosmologists think the universe began in a big bang, we don't know how that big bang came about, or how all that is could come from apparently nothing—and the question itself doesn't make sense because how can we speak of a time that's before time? Time is concurrent with the origins of our universe. So it doesn't even make sense to speak of a time before the big bang. So what about infinity? Back in Ancient Greece it was taboo to suggest that infinity existed. How could something be, by definition, immeasurable? Pythagoras hypothesized that the value of pi would be comprised of an infinite series of numbers without repetition of any pattern. Modern computers have calculated the value of pi to trillions of places and still have found Pythagoras' hypothesis to be true: the value of pi appears to be infinite. (Pi, the ratio of the circle's circumference to its diameter. Incidentally, this means that a circle with a diameter of 1 will have an infinite circumference, the value of which is pi: 3.14~ .) Whereever we look, mathematics and astronomy, cosmology and science, all point not only to what is beyond our comprehension (we can't wrap our minds around the vast distances of space), but also to the existence of infinite mystery.

Which is why it doesn't make sense for us to try to pin down who or what, or to define what God is or is not. Today we are celebrating not an occasion or event (like Jesus' birth, or his death, or resurrection, or a saint's life, or the institution of the Lord's Supper), but an idea, the idea that God is Three and simultaneously One. We can easily bend our minds out of shape trying to understand how that can be so.

And yet, speaking geometrically, we don't need to know the exact value of a circle in order to use circles in our lives. We continue to experience the infinite mystery of the circle—in some ways, it is a concrete mystery, like a moebius strip (one of those shapes where the surface area is infinite):



We experience circles and spheres and other shapes and applications of shapes and lines like parabolas and ellipses and so on, without understanding the mathematics, and without realizing the mystery in the midst of which we live. It's the experience, in fact, the practicality of the infinite mysteries of geometry and science which count, and which make life possible. The more we delve into science and biology and mathematics, the more we come to realize the infinite mystery which inhabits us, which constitutes every aspect of our existence.

We don't have to understand the Trinity to experience God's work in the world. It is because Christians of a specific time and place experienced God as Creator, Incarnate Word, and Spirit that they began to speak of God (the One, whose Name means ISness or Being) in those ways. And then wrestled with the paradox that God, who is One, is also Three. The problem with wrestling with words is that, like the question of human consciousness, or the question of how big the universe is, or the value of pi, we cannot pin down that which ultimately is mystery. We can only experience it. We only know God through God's interaction with us and revelation to us. The more we explore the nature of our existence, the fact that "in him we live and move and have our being" becomes increasingly relevant. Without wanting to stray into pantheism (in which God is in everything… it would be more accurate to say that everything is—or in Christ, will be—in God), we came from God, we are dependent on God's mystery for life. We believe that in Jesus, God became one with all that is, dissolving any barriers to full union of creation with creator. In his death, entropy, death, isolation, sin, brokenness, disease and so on are dealt with, and in his resurrection all is made new. In the gift of the Spirit of life we come alive with the life that will be, which breaks into the here and now, because infinite eternity is of a different order to the time that we know. And through all of this, the truth and wisdom of this infinity mystery, in and through which God is, is love.

"God has poured his love into our hearts through the Spirit which has been given to us." Wisdom's invitation in Proverbs to sit at her table and sample her fruit, an invitation to share her delight as she was there in the beginning, at the creation of all that is. Personification… Divine Logos or Word, Sophia. Same entity. Loving act. It is as Paul says: in Christ, through believing in him – trusting him, sitting at Wisdom's table, experiencing God's hospitality in Christ, we are justified through faith, admitted, if you like, to the awareness of the mystery of love in which we live and move and have our living/being. And this is what it's all about: what this vast, vast universe of infinite mysteries, is all about: living and being in love. In God's love.

Of all the ways of understanding the Trinity, I like what the Cappadocians said, and what modern theologians have picked up and run with more recently. The Cappadocians were Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa - all bishops in what is modern day Turkey in the mid 300s. They were the first to state that God was a community: three persons, one essence. And how Father, Son, and Spirit were both one and three came down to mutual love... The same sort of love that Paul talks about in Philippians 2 when he says Christ, though being by nature God "emptied himself" in the incarnation. The word used is *kenosis*, self-emptying love. It's this sort of love, the love that looks to the interest of the other, which is absorbed in the other, that is shared by Father, Son and Spirit. The Cappadocians used another beautiful word for this, *perichoresis*, which comes from the world of the theatre, and refers to dancing in a circle. The idea is that the way God shares kenotic, self-emptying love, is like a dance that goes round and round and round and is never ending. The love doesn't stop, as if the Father gives the Son a gift of love and he keeps it all to himself. The gift of love is passed between continuously between the Three.

What then of disease, pain, suffering, death? God is infinitely present in all these as well, and God's infinite love whispers to us that all things shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well, and that we shall see that all things shall be well. It's not that these things are insignificant. On the contrary: where the earth is raped, God weeps; where the asylum seeker sets herself on fire, God bleeds and burns; where a man is killed by a king hit, God is indignant; where we discredit another person, run them down, gossip about them, it is God we are hurting. We do these things, thinking there is no answer, and no accountability. The mystery of the Trinity, the mystery of God's infinite creative love, tells us that there will be a reckoning, and for all these things, there will be an answer. Already is an answer: in God's own action in becoming human and dying under the weight of the world’s brokenness, and in God's own being which raised Jesus from death, and in whom the hope of renewal, healing, and new life is heralded.

Sit in the mystery. Ponder the infinite with wonder and awe. Allow the mystery of God's infinite love to pour into our hearts in silence. And in the power of that mystery, in touch with the mystery of our own lives, go forth into the world to open the eyes of the blind, to heal the wounded, to bind up the broken, and to announce the year of God's favour. If God is characterized by a mystery of self-emptying love shared mutually in relationship of community, and we are in the image of God, and if we’ve been invited to take a seat at the table, and a place in the dance of God, then we too are called to, have within us, the vocation to engage in love which gives itself away. That’s not easy thing, because our world refuses to engage in mystery and sit with questions. Answers are demanded, and we want to control; we’re caught in systems of domination and power-over. But what the mystery of God being three and yet one points to is that the secret of God’s power, of God’s energy, is that it is given away, shared. That’s a radical new way of being which it at odds with the world. Can we have the courage to enter the dance, to take the Spirit’s hand and be swept up into a new space in which we don’t have control but can trust this God who loves us infinitely and without measure? Can we have courage to live as Jesus’ did, emptying himself of all but love?

The Lord be with you

**and also with you.**