“Explain the Unexplainable – or – Believe the Believable”
+ Trinity B +
Acts 8:26-40; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8
June 7, 2009

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

A few months ago I was talking to my Mom on the phone and she said, “That is really unexplainable.” I said, “Do you mean ‘inexplicable’?” To which she replied, “I don’t use that word.” Oh.

Today is “Holy Trinity,” the only church festival that observes not an event in the life of Jesus, or a commemoration of a saint or martyr, but a doctrine: the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The problem with this is that the Trinity is unexplainable or, if you choose to use the word in your vocabulary, inexplicable.

Trying to explain it generally leads people into one of three major heresies and no pastor likes being charged with heresy. Let me give you a “for instance.” If you have ever taught Sunday School or VBS or attended it and seen an apple (seeds, fruit and skin) to describe God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit you are guilty of Sabellianism, which is an offshoot of modalism, Noetianism, Modal Monarchianism and quite possibly “Patripassianism.” From now on, stick to the shamrock, the three-leafed clover that St. Patrick used. It’s safer – and stick to the Creeds – all 3 of the ones we proclaim as Lutherans (Catholics, Methodists, Anglicans, and Presbyterians do, as well). The Nicene Creed deals with Arianism – the 2 natures of Jesus: God and Man. Was he a man that God was poured into at his baptism and left when he died on the cross? Was he like gluing together a God board and a Human board? Was it like Kool-aid with God being poured into the water of humanity (our bodies are 97% water) and being diluted?

All of those arguments, the heresies, and the Creeds that address them come from human attempts to “Explain the Unexplainable/Inexplicable.” Of course we want it explained. We are curious human beings. We like to know how things work. When we know how things work, we either accept them or reject them. So, given our Western (you gotta prove it) mindset, we have come up with a word that is used for nothing else, the word “Triune,” which means literally “three in one” or backwards “one in three,” and that’s what we say defines the Trinity: one God in three persons.

How easily we say that. In that we know all about God and yet understand very little – indeed all our lives could be spent in pondering the Trinity and we would still know very little.

The three lessons this morning simply and elegantly portray this three in one, one in three, God of ours. God is majestic and mysterious. Isaiah identified what we read this morning as a vision (not a dream from eating too much hot dish on a stick at the Minnesota State Fair) but a vision, directly from God and a peek into Heaven (heaven being more like the cream puffs and buttered corn of the Wisconsin State Fair). God is so holy that Isaiah was astounded to have seen the King of the universe and not be dead as a result of having seen God. Holiness is absolutely
overwhelming. We may stand in awe of great people, but we have never stood in the actual presence of a holy God, whose perfection will not tolerate our imperfection. If all we know of God is this chunk of Isaiah, we have nothing to confess except that we are in big trouble.

Same thing for the psalm for this day and week of the Holy Trinity! How easily, how glibly, we people of God’s glory and power whose voice fractures the forests of Lebanon and makes mountains hop like bucking broncos.

We need more information and we get it from the Gospels. Now I have preached a lot of sermons about this midnight meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus. Did you notice by the way that half-way through it, Nicodemus had nothing left to say? That whole being “born from above” thing must have baffled him into silence. And Nicodemus, was a professional theologian - a teacher of Israel. The best theologians I have studied under or worked alongside through the years, or been pastor to, have always been able to come clean and admit “I don’t know” when asked a question about God that is inexplicable. I know that I am rather hard pressed to explain how one can be born from above by the Spirit. I know God does what God promises – how exactly in each instance? The proof is not in a feeling – though feelings are nice. The proof, like God, simply is.

I have never quite known how to take much of the rest of the Gospel lesson. We usually use it as a prologue to the gloriously simple John 3:16 and breathe a sigh of relief that we got there. But what Jesus said before those words is truly astounding. He was saying to the original Nick at Nite and to us is, if you want to see God, if you want to know God, take a look at me. Take a look at Jesus—His word’s and His Works that were signs of where He came from and from whom He came. He was the ultimate example of “like father, like son” and more than a “spitting image” Jesus is God. He was a Son abandoned for a time by His Father and hung out to die on a cross outside Jerusalem.

Now be careful what you say about that—somebody else got it wrong and invented a new heresy, “patripassionism” which stated that God the Father also suffered on the cross with Jesus and is also know as Sabellianism. Sabellius tried to untangle the mess of three in one and only succeeded in making more of a mess.

So what have got so far: A Father—that is the term Jesus used. He also used “Abba,” an Aramaic word for Daddy and said we could call God our dad, and Paul picked up on that in Romans chapter 8. Imagine that: the almighty, majestic, mysterious creator of the universe answers to the name of “Daddy.” That’s why Martin Luther said that for Jesus’ sake and in His name, we can approach God as children approach a kind and loving father.

Well, we did a lot with the Spirit of God last week on Pentecost. I don’t expect anyone who was here to volunteer today to be my methurgeman, my interpreter, my stand by my side guy. But let me just reinforce it one more time. God breathes His Spirit into us—can’t see it; can’t touch it; can’t taste it. You only know it is there by the things that it does. The Spirit is the one who takes everything we know of Jesus and every attitude we have learned from Jesus and nudges us, sometimes wallops us, into growing more like Him, in our thoughts, words and deeds.
So there you have it: no better explained than before you walked through those doors. But that’s okay. My job, our job, is not to “Explain the Unexplainable,” but to “Believe what God has made Believable.” So believable He put on some skin and walked among us; so approachable, He placed His Spirit within us; so gracious He lets us call Him our “daddy.” That is something to ponder not just this morning but every day as we live in our Father’s kingdom and serve him in faithfulness and love prompted by the Spirit and redeemed by our brother, Savior, and Lord Jesus.

Amen.
Now may our almighty and ever-living Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, keep us steadfast in faith, defend us from all evil and bring us at last into His presence.