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## “Relationships of Love”

A sermon by Sam R. Miglarese

Trinity Sunday (Year C)

May 26, 2013

Proverbs 8:1–4, 22–31; Psalm 8; Romans 5:1–5; John 16:12–15

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*Gracious God, open our ears to hear Your Word. Open our hearts to remember those who have died in service to their country, to those who have died as a result of natural disasters, for those here and abroad who have died as a result of terrorist acts of war. Open our ears to hear Your Word. Open our hearts of love. Through Christ our Lord, and in the One Spirit, we pray. Amen.*

We sang the famous hymn, *Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!* – “Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty! God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!”<sup>1</sup> On this day, we commemorate the teaching, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. This celebration gives us the opportunity to realize the extent to which we pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, to the extent to which we baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and at the Table of the Lord, we pray the great prayer of Thanksgiving always directed to God the Father through the saving action of his Son and by sanctification of the Holy Spirit. The whole worship experience of our lives is Trinitarian.

Too often, we see the great mystery of God as inscrutable, and we fail to grasp that the mystery of the Trinity is not a problem that we need to solve or figure out, but

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<sup>1</sup> Reginald Heber, “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!” *The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 138.

it is a mystery to be lived. We've lived that mystery these past 90 days. We lived it through the 40 days of Lent that culminated in Easter when we walked with Jesus through the desert, to the mountaintop and into the city of Jerusalem to witness his saving death for our salvation. We witnessed anew his resurrection from the dead when God vindicated his life and ministry among us, and then for 50 days, we experienced and explored the mystery of the Risen One among us, culminating in the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit that we celebrated last week on the Feast of Pentecost.

In some real way, we have been living and participating in the mystery of God as three throughout the course of the year of grace, the liturgical year. We celebrate the mystery of God not as a problem to be solved but as a way of life for Christians. God, in Christianity, is a supernatural mystery but not to be perceived simply as an obstacle to our understanding but as the way in which God has related to us and the way in which we are called to relate to God.

Let me tell you a story about St. Augustine, one of the most famous of all theologians. It's more of a legend than a story because it helps capture the mystery of the Trinity since he probably, more than any other theologian, has written the most profound reflections on the meaning of that doctrine for us.

The story goes something like this: a little boy was on the beach in Northern Africa, digging a hole in the sand and putting water in it from the ocean. Augustine was walking along the beach, contemplating the mystery of the Trinity, and was watching the little boy dig the little hole, walk to the edge of the sea, bring the water and watch this repetitious act, one following the other, over and over. He finally said to the little boy, "What are you doing?" The little boy says, "I'm going to put the entire ocean into this sand hole." Augustine says to the little boy, "This is impossible." The little boy turns to Augustine and says, "Yes, it's impossible, just like it's impossible for you to fit the Trinity into your little brain!"

The boy vanishes. The story captures an important truth. We will never "figure out" the mystery of God. But that is why we call this truth of God "Mystery" because it is so far beyond our capacity to fully grasp it. We would do a better job

at filling that sand hole with the ocean than fully understanding the mystery of God's existence.

The good news is we do not have to rely on our puny intellects "to figure it all out." God has spoken to us (Heb. 1:1). God has spoken to us in Word, in the Sacraments, and fully in his Son, the Word made Flesh as well as the way in which we lead our Christian lives of service, in justice, and in peacemaking. In every act of worship, we are constantly interrelating with the God as Father, Son, and Spirit.

You will not find the language of the creed in the Scriptures. The Bible never uses the word "trinity" as such. It is a mystery but not meant for confusion. To put it in the simplest terms I know: what God has revealed to us is this. The deepest mystery of God, Father, Son and Spirit is all about relationships of love. The great mystery of God is all about the inexpressible fullness of love and how that love is revealed through the language and experience of relationships. Our belief in the trinity invites us to live in relationships of love. We know God as triune not by theological speculation but "by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor. 13:13). To the extent that we appreciate our personal relationships in our lives as relationships of love, to that extent, we can appreciate the great mystery of God among us.

Clearly, in the Scriptures that we have heard today, God cares about us. In fact, the Psalmist is so surprised that God cares about us that David says, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (Ps. 8:4) We know in John's Gospel that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son..." (John 3:16). We heard in Romans this morning that "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5). And in the Gospel text from the farewell discourse, Jesus speaks to his disciples about the Paraclete who will come when he ascends to the Father and guide them "to all the truth... [for] all that the Father has is mine" (John 16:13, 15).

*Love.* As we cultivate our relationships of love, the relationships to our spouses in committed and faithful love, and to our children, to all levels of our friendships, those relationships can be a rich source of understanding the very mystery of God.

You know your relationships and I know mine, and through them we have a glimpse and taste of the mystery of God among us when we see those relationships in action with others.

This past week, I had the opportunity to assist an Italian family from Naples in navigating the Duke health care system. They flew over from Naples to receive a stem cell transfusion and receive an evaluation from the Duke doctors. When I was called in to assist “through the mystery of the Internet,” I helped in translating with the doctors and the nurses throughout the course of four days. What I experienced was something really special—the depth of the love for their child who has severe cerebral palsy was so intense, so real, that whenever that child winced with pain, they experienced it a hundred-fold. When the child experienced a smile of joy, their joy was richly evident. Just to watch that bond of parental love and concern and care for their child, who was conceived through in vitro fertilization since they were not able to conceive on their own, was a pretty amazing story of their love and the bond of parental love for their child.

So the primary challenge and imperative of today’s worship is to cultivate love: the more we cultivate love, the more we immerse ourselves in love, the more we pour out our love into the hearts of those we love, the more open we are to know the mystery of God, to experience the Triune God. Call to mind your relationships of love in the course of God’s saving relationship to us, and you will appreciate anew not only your commitments of love but also God’s inner life as a communion of love.

The second challenge we face is to widen and expand that circle of love. That love that has been poured out into our hearts by the love of God, that God has so loved the world—widen it, deepen it, expand it so that our circle of love is not simply drawn in but pushed outward so that those around us, those far from us can experience the depth of our love, the care and concern of our love whenever they are in real need.

The mystery of the Trinity is all about the interrelationship of God, Father, Son, and Spirit. Let’s not take for granted the way in which we pray, the way in which

we baptize, the way in which we lead one another in the prayer at Eucharist. Allow our prayer to remind us that God has revealed himself to us as three, not because he wants to confuse us but because that's the way God is in his experience with us in offering us the opportunity for salvation and eternal life with him. We give thanks: In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.