

Column – Trinity

A young man just starting out in ordained ministry is supposed to have asked a more seasoned minister about preaching. The older man's advice was short and to the point: "Preach about God . . . and about 20 minutes."

God should indeed be the focus of every sermon, whatever its length. But, which God? After all, the mystery we call God has many faces and is open to a vast array of interpretations. Almost everyone has heard someone say, often with passion: "MY God would never do _____ (fill in the blank)." Or, in reaction to someone else's understanding of God: "That's certainly not MY God."

What stands behind such remarks is a me-in-the-mirror god, one made in *our* image rather than the other way round? Very likely at times we've all been guilty of imposing our preferences and opinions on the Almighty and stand in need of repentance and forgiveness for this heresy.

Earlier I called God a mystery. In today's usage, mystery almost always means something difficult, indeed impossible, to understand. Certainly, there is firm biblical basis for speaking of God in this manner. For example, in Isaiah 58:9, we hear God say: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

In the New Testament, Paul, echoing another statement found in Isaiah, says something similar: "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?"

From such passages, we are given to understand that 'God' is infinite in every respect, thus in that sense a 'mystery'. Yet, we must not stop here. When the Greek word which stands behind our English word mystery is used in the New Testament, there is an added dimension.

Something which had not been revealed, now has. Light has come piercing the darkness.

The mystery of God is one area where this illumination has come. In 1 Timothy 3:16, we read: “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.”

Jesus of Nazareth is of course the one being referenced in this verse. He fills out our picture of God, or, as one theologian has said: Jesus puts a face on the invisible God.

Think of looking through the viewfinder of a camera. In the beginning, the image is imperfect, sketchy. But with a turn or two of the mechanism, the image comes into focus. Something like this happened when God became man in Jesus Christ.

Still further disclosure of the mystery called God came on the first Christian Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus’ waiting disciples. The God who was above them and who had walked beside them in the person of Jesus was now in them.

From these two great events would come the Church’s doctrine of the Trinity . . . God is One and God is Three. In the Christian church year, the doctrine of the Trinity is celebrated on the Sunday after Pentecost (June 4). This day reminds us that no me-in-the-mirror God will do. Only the God of self-revelation is able to give clarity, meaning and purpose in life. So let us sing: “Praise God from whom all blessings flow . . . Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.”

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hast given unto us thy servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty to worship the Unity; We beseech thee that thou wouldest keep us stedfast in this faith, and evermore defend us from all adversities, who livest and

reignest, one God, world without end. Amen. (Collect for Trinity Sunday from the Book of Common Prayer)

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