

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Whether they be highly developed and advanced civilizations or primitive and remote jungle tribes, there's clear evidence that all people throughout history, all cultures recognized and paid homage to a higher power and authority, a supreme being that exists above and beyond our human existence to which they had to answer. This is what is referred to as a natural knowledge of God. It's a knowledge of God that results from man's dependence on a force or forces of nature beyond himself for survival in a world that he can't control: The sun and the moon, the wind and the rain, hunger and disease, life itself and ultimately death. Or when things happen in the lives of people that cause them to wonder whether there isn't some higher power controlling their destiny. A natural knowledge of God also results from man's observation of the beauty, the order, the vastness, the complexity, and the intricacy of the universe and the magnificent world in which we live.

Who hasn't had one of those God moments? Those moments when you instinctively knew and felt and were convinced of not only the existence of God, but also of how awesome and amazing and beyond human comprehension He really is. Whether it was standing at the rim of the Grand Canyon or watching a particularly brilliant sunset or witnessing the birth of a child. Maybe it was flying high above the mountains and the clouds, maybe it was a time when you had narrowly experienced an escape from death.

The vast majority of people know this, that someone, something, some force is beyond and behind all that we see and feel and experience, but this natural knowledge of God is actually quite limited in its use because although it may help us to know something about God, that He is magnificent, intelligent, creative, all-powerful, a truly awesome God, it doesn't lead us to truly know Him and ultimately leaves us guessing at or trying to work out our own idea of who God really is and who we are in relationship to Him, which helps to explain why there are so many different religions in the world.

This natural knowledge of God of itself doesn't answer the really big question, is God for us or against us? But we, you and I, don't have a God who leaves us guessing about who He is. You see, in addition to this natural knowledge of God that's built into our human nature, we also have what we call the revealed knowledge of God; what God has chosen to reveal to us about Himself, what he has chosen to tell us about Himself. God has chosen to reveal Himself to us in His word. The Bible is God's written revelation of Himself. It is God's word in human words, words that He, Himself, inspired men to write in their own style and language. Everything that God wants us to know about Him, everything that we need to know about Him is in the book we call the Bible.

But notice that I said that the Bible reveals everything God wants or chooses for us to know about Him, but even the Bible doesn't reveal everything that there is to know about God. It doesn't completely reveal God to us. God is and in this life will always be to some extent a mystery to us simply because He is God.

And certainly one aspect of our Christian faith where we are most directly confronted with that divine mystery is the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Today, again, is Trinity Sunday on our church calendar, a day when we contemplate what is arguably the most mind-boggling of all Christian teachings, that the one true God is a triune or a three-in-one God, that God is three separate and distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And yet there is only one God. One plus one plus one equals one. I would say that qualifies as mystery, wouldn't you?

The Athanasian Creed that we just finished reading a moment ago was written almost 1,600 years ago to clarify this doctrine of the Holy Trinity and to combat a false teaching that had crept into the church at that time known as Arianism, a false teaching that denied that Jesus was true God. The Creed is attributed to a man named Athanasius who lived in the fourth century AD. But most historians agree that it's doubtful that he was the author of the Athanasian Creed, but rather that his name became attached to it because, as a Christian teacher and scholar, he adamantly refuted that Arian heresy. Whoever the author or authors were, the Athanasian Creed does a very admirable job of attempting to put into words our understanding of this difficult teaching, this difficult doctrine of the Trinity.

But I think I'm safe in saying that when we finished reading the words of that Creed a few moments ago, not one of you thought to yourself, oh, now I get it. Now it all makes perfect sense. Now I completely understand the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

Let's face it; God, in all His fullness, in all His holiness, in all His wisdom, in His triunity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is incomprehensible to us. Although Athanasius may not have been the author of the Athanasian Creed, he understood the unknowable and unsearchable nature of God and is quoted as once saying, "Man can perceive only the hem of the garment of the triune God."

Martin Luther, speaking of the three separate persons of the Trinity, said this, and I'm going to quote, "But how such a distinction of persons exists in the divine essence from eternity is a mystery which we shall and must leave unsolved. Who has ever been able to discover or explain the process by which a leaflet grows from a tree or a tiny grain of corn becomes a root or a cherry grows from blossom to wood? Again, who can explain how the bodily members of a human being manifestly grow? What the sight of the eye is. How the tongue can make such a variety of sounds and words. Much less are we able to analyze the inner workings of the mind; its thoughts, its meditations, its memory. Why then should we

presume that with our reason, we can comprehend the eternal and invisible essence of God?" End quote.

In fact, it's part of God's revealed knowledge to us that He is beyond our ability to know or comprehend. Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the Lord, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever." Ecclesiastes 3:11, "He, God, has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men, yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end." Psalm 145, verse 3, "Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. His greatness no one can fathom." Isaiah 55:8 and 9, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." Romans 11:33, "All the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable His judgments and His paths beyond tracing out."

And I could continue with many other Bible references that speak to that truth that God is of a nature that defies any explanation or comprehension on our part, but all of that really shouldn't be surprising to any of us, and it's okay. In fact, my contention is that it's a good thing because if God was something or someone that we could completely understand and explain, then He really wouldn't be much of a God, would He? Think about it. Do we need, do we even want a God that is no greater than our human intellectual capacity to explain Him? Can a God who can be reduced to the level of our human understanding really be of any use to us? No. And so it is that we can't know God completely. We can't talk about an infinite, all-knowing, all-powerful God without running into some difficulties in our limited and finite minds. We can't understand the essence of God. We can't grasp the concept that one plus one plus one equals one. The Trinity is most certainly divine mystery.

But, and this is what I pray you will take from my message this morning, although we can't completely know who God is, we can know what God has done and what our relationship to Him is because that He has clearly revealed to us in His word. God's nature, His essence defies comprehension, but what He has done for us is the straightforward and simple truth of the gospel.

I don't get the concept of Trinity, but I know what our triune God is like. He is a Savior God who so loved the world that He gave His only son, the second person of His triunity, Jesus Christ, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. That's the simple triune gospel that we can know and that we do believe and confess.

Paul writes in Colossians 2, "My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding

in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." You could throw a million questions at me about the nature of a three-in-one God that I can't answer, but one thing about him is very clear: He is a God of amazing grace who saved sinners like you and like me by giving of Himself, by God becoming one of us and then suffering and dying on a cross to deliver us from the guilt of our own rebellion against Him.

I can't help you understand the mysterious ways of the spirit of God who is like the wind, doing His work where and when He pleases, but I can tell you that He was at work through the promises of His word and in with the waters of holy Baptism poured out in the name of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit on poor, miserable sinners like you and me, washing away our sin, creating in us a childlike faith in the God who died to save us. I can't break the triune God down into little chunks that you can easily digest, and yet I can offer you a meal, a feast in which infinite has enclosed Himself within the finite that God became man one of us. I can't tell you how He did it, but I can tell you that His very own body and blood are truly there in the bread and the wine for our forgiveness, for our salvation. I can't comprehend three persons, each 100% God, and yet separate and distinct from the others so that there are no less than three persons but no more than one God. I don't get that. But I don't need a God I can understand, I need a God who is holy and all-powerful and totally awesome, but at the same time is loving and merciful and gracious.

Throughout its history, the church has always struggled to explain the doctrine of the Holy Trinity; and maybe that's why the creed that we recite in connection with Trinity Sunday is the longest and the most difficult of the three Christian creeds. But you don't have to understand the mystery of an incomprehensible three-in-one God, you only need to believe in Him, confess Him, and then give Him all thanks and praise for His great love and for the salvation that is ours. In the name of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.