

Glory be to God the Father, glory be to God the Son, glory be to God the Spirit—ever three and ever one. Amen

Romans 11:33-36

Today is the festival of the Holy Trinity. Today marks the beginning of the “nonfestival half” of the church year. During the festival half, we celebrate Christmas – when God the Father gave us his only begotten Son to be our Savior. Then we observed the triumphant festival of Easter – when God the Son, who had died, rose from death to give us life. Last Sunday was Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit gave birth to the Christian church. Today we wrap them all together in one great, grand feast of the Holy Trinity as we celebrate the relationship of our triune God to us and our relationship to him.

The words *Trinity* and *triune* are not mentioned in Scripture, but the concept of our God being “three in one” is evident everywhere in the Word. Jesus points it out, when he tells his disciples to “**go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**” (Matthew 28:19).

To be perfectly honest the Trinity is a mystery. This relationship within the Godhead is not something we have discovered. We know the fact of the Trinity only because God has revealed this information to us. It is beyond our ability to understand or to figure out. Nevertheless, we believe this truth because God tells us that this is the way it is. With that in mind the apostle Paul encourages us to recognize God’s mysteries and to praise him.

In that the same way that we are unable to explain and understand how our God is three distinct persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—in one divine being, so we also have difficulties in explaining and understanding God’s way of working. Yet even with this inability we still raise our voices in praise. Paul says in our text, “**To him be the glory forever.**” Today join the apostle in praising God. “**PRAISE GOD FOR HIS MYSTERIES.**” Paul is certain that we will praise the Lord if we only consider 1) that his ways are beyond our ability to understand; and 2) that God who owes us nothing gives us everything.

I.

When Paul begins, “**O the depth of the riches, the wisdom and the knowledge of God,**” he is referring us back to all the topics which he had discussed in previous chapters. God’s chosen people in the Old Testament had received countless blessings from God. Yet despite those blessing, the Israelites had hardened their hearts against God and the majority of them finally rejected him. Paul pointed out that the children of Israel had at one time brought the message of the Messiah to other nations. Now those gentiles, those non-Jewish, people who had been turned to Christ, were bringing the light of the gospel back to the Jews.

God wants all people to be saved and if someone is lost in hell that person is the cause of his or her own damnation. People close their ears to the message of the Savior and their hearts to the working of the Holy Spirit. Even the most wicked person on Judgment Day will stand before God and know that this is not what God wanted, but the result of his own unbelief. This we know now because he has given us the information.

But we have many other questions which go unanswered in the pages of Scripture. We know, for example, that before God, “**There is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**” (Romans 3:23). If all sinners are equally wicked, hard-headed and hard-hearted in God’s sight, why then does it seem that some people are given more chances to repent than others? Why has the gospel message been heard here at Trinity for more than one hundred and fifty years and for only a short time in other places? Why does a Christian person who seems to us to have great value die early, while the troublemaker lives to old age? Why do so many hard working people have so little to show for their efforts, while others who use deceit and who cheat pile up wealth? We cannot always answer those questions completely because God hasn’t seen fit to give us all the information we might like to have.

Why? Paul tells us why, “**How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out. Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his advisor?**” Paul’s questions suggest the answer to our problems. We know nothing about God and his reasons and ways outside of his Word. It would be the height of foolishness to meddle in God’s affairs, to question his wisdom and justice. God has not invited us to advise him. Our minds, after all, are not equal to his. Now if we always conducted our own affairs flawlessly maybe we could attempt to ask “why.” But look at us, we so often fail and falter and blunder through our affairs, who are we to question God?

Since we, as Christians, are familiar with the Lord, how can we question his wisdom? Instead of questions, Paul urges us to look at what we know from God and then to raise our voices in praise. We will most certainly praise God in eternity, when everything is much clearer to us. Why not also praise him now? Praise him all the

more because his ways are beyond us. Praise him because he has seen fit to tell us of heaven and the way that leads there.

II.

Praise God also because he gives us everything, even when he doesn't owe us anything. As Paul puts it, **“Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?”** When have we ever been God's benefactors? When have we helped him to do something he couldn't accomplish in any other way? The opposite is true. We are indebted to God. Air, light, water—these are all gifts from God for which we can never repay him. And the person who boasts about his/her mental and physical gifts is a fool for God is the one responsible. As James reminds us in his epistle, **“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights”** (1:17).

When we speak of spiritual gifts, again it is God who gets the credit. Even if we could keep the whole law and not break a single commandment, we would still have to confess that we are unprofitable servants. We have done only what is expected of us. But we do not keep God's commands. Countless times we have been guilty of breaking them. If God owes the perfect person nothing, then he certainly doesn't owe sinners anything.

God could have thrown every one of us into hell and no angel would have said that God was unjust. When we compare ourselves and our lives with what God wants, we would not be able to argue that God was unfair. After we understand that God owes us nothing, we begin to wonder why God has been so good to us. His goodness in the face of our sin is another mystery. It provides us with another reason to praise him. He owed no Savior to the world, but sent his own Son anyway. Praise God for his goodness.

Paul drives home the point of God's greatness, when he writes, **“For from him and through him and to him are all things.”** When Paul says that all things are **“from”** God, he is calling attention to the truth that God brought everything into existence by the power of his almighty Word. It wasn't by chance that everything was made. God spoke and everything was exactly as he wanted it. We praise God for his creation, even though we don't fully understand how he did it.

Paul also mentions that all things are **“through”** God. The Lord not only got things started by his almighty power, he also keeps the world going by that same power. Some say, all things exist and move according to certain fixed laws of nature. The laws of nature are their gods. But who controls the laws of nature? The Lord who put them into place is not bound by them. Our God has and still can operate according to his miraculous power. It is God and not our instinct for self-preservation which keeps us alive. Some people follow all the rules of health, they eat right and exercise. They take care of themselves and still they die young. Others are weak and feeble, yet they live to an old age. God is the Preserver of all things. We may not understand his ways and his methods, but we trust him. He knows what he is doing and why he does it.

Finally, the apostle says all things are **“to”** God. God is the central point around which all things turn. All things and all people are created by him and exist for his glory. The forces that move the world are not luck or people working out their own destinies. God makes the world go around, and all things must serve to increase God's glory. We are unable always to see and understand why God moves as he does because we cannot fully understand God. He is so much greater than we are. His thoughts are above our thoughts. Yet we have ever reason to praise him.

That means that we are to use the information he has given us about himself and his ways of working—for ourselves and share it with others. Through God's guiding Word we know that we have a Savior. Our salvation is certain. There is no doubt about it. What more can we want? True, we might like to understand better the mysteries of God. However, when we are reminded that God's reasons and ways are beyond us, that is not a cause for doubt. That is cause for praising our triune Lord for all that he is and all that he has done and all that he continues to do for us. **“To him be the glory forever.”** Amen.

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