

## "A Faith Uncertain"

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**First Presbyterian Church**  
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**Old Testament Lesson:** Isaiah 48:15-17

**New Testament Lesson:** John 16:12-15

Today is Trinity Sunday, when we look at one of the most mysterious aspects of our faith – that God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit are three distinct persons in one unified being. How can that be?!?

Christianity is the only religion to believe in the Three-in-One'ness of God. Our whole belief system is built on a mystery we will never unravel, at least, this side of the cross. It's one of those uncertainties that makes our faith so strong.

We all have uncertainties in life that make our faith all the stronger. For me, the first time I encountered this type of faith that goes beyond what we can know was when my first wife got sick with leukemia, at age 30.

I remember making her a Christmas Card the year before she passed that said, "We must never forget God's blessings." I don't know where that came from. It wasn't from me – I didn't write that consciously.

If I had written something consciously at that time it would not have been about God's blessings. We had none, none that you could see. But from somewhere deep down inside, those words arose – "We must never forget God's blessings" – blessings, in the midst of a life-and-death battle with leukemia. The mystery of those words made my faith stronger.

And then when Lynn died, the priest at her memorial mass talked about having had to do a lot of services for young people – more than should ever have to be done. He said, "I don't know why young people die. That's one of those questions I'm going to ask when I see God face to face."

That strengthened my faith. Hearing that a priest had questions that couldn't be answered this side of the cross strengthened my faith. The uncertainties of our lives – and especially the tragic and impossible ones – strengthen our faith. I know you know what I mean, if you've ever had to move forward on faith alone.

We all live with unanswerable questions. These questions sit somewhere along the line that goes from absolute certainty to doubt. Doubt by the way is not a bad thing in the Christian faith. It's probably less destructive and threatening than certainty, depending on how it's held.

For instance, if you tell someone who doubts whether heaven and hell exist that he or she obviously doesn't know Jesus and is surely headed in the wrong direction, how is that Christian? It's not. It tears down faith instead of building it up.

And yet, we do it all the time, most of the time innocently. Someone suffers the loss of a child and is told, "Heaven needed another angel." Really?!! No. That level of certainty can damage the faith.

Nobody knows for sure why young people die. But those with faith know in their heart of hearts that even in something as tragic as the death of a young person, God has not abandoned us. I hope we can agree on that.

Now, what does all of this have to do with Trinity Sunday and what Jesus says about God, the Holy Spirit, and his place in the Trinity? I'm glad you asked. The mystery of the Trinity that Jesus reveals to us in today's New Testament lesson is central to all mysteries of life. The mystery of the Trinity is what has us thanking God for his many blessings even when facing the worst of the worst.

***Blessings amid tragedy.***

Listen to this mystery unfold, when Jesus says, "All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he (the Holy Spirit) will take what is mine (which is also what is God's) and declare it to you." Jesus is saying that he and the Holy Spirit and God are one – "of one being," which is from the Nicene Creed that we will recite after the Anthem today; it's usually recited on Communion Sunday but it's great for Trinity Sunday, as well. Three distinct persons of one being. It's a mystery.

At Princeton Seminary, I studied under Daniel Migliore, author of the widely used textbook "Faith Seeking Understanding" – you ought to buy it and read it. You'll be blown away by what you learn. Or borrow one of my copies. In "Faith Seeking Understanding," Migliore writes this about the Trinity: "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (are) related to each other ... as Lover, Beloved, and Love" – God the Lover; Jesus the Beloved, and the Holy Spirit who is Love. Further, says Migliore, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are "three equal persons ... united in ... mutual self-giving love (that is) so intimate as to be an 'indwelling' ... of each other."

In other words, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are three manifestations of the same love, distinct and yet one. It is a mystery. But what's not a mystery is what the Trinity means for us. What it means for us is that Love the Holy Spirit lives in us, that we are God's beloved in Christ, and that God is the being and source of love. God is love – expressed, received, and always with us. Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

So, of all the questions we have about Heaven and Hell, pain and suffering, life after death, will I see Jesus, does God save everyone or only Christians, do miracles still happen, does God answer prayer, has anyone ever seen God, what does God look like – of all these questions and more, there is one certainty. Love. God's love – expressed, received, and present, always.

This central mystery of our faith answers the only question that really matters, the only question that makes all the other questions OK to have, the single question that tells us everything we need to know about being a Christian. Does anyone want to know what that question is!?!?

The only question that really matters is: “Am I OK?” When you ask that question in the midst of any doubt or fear or tragedy. God is there to say without question, “Yes, my child, you are OK.” “I’ve got you.” “You will make it through this.” “You are and will be blessed, even through this.” What more could we need? Isn’t God good?

Let me close with this, from Oswald Chambers’ classic devotional *My Utmost for His Highest*: “The spiritual life is the life of a child. We are not uncertain of God, just uncertain of what he is going to do next.

If our certainty is only in our beliefs and not in God, we develop a sense of self-righteousness, become overly critical, and are limited by the view that our beliefs are complete and settled.

But when we have the right relationship with God,” explains Chambers, “life is full of spontaneous, joyful uncertainty and expectancy.”

Is your life full of spontaneous, joyful uncertainty and expectancy – not all the time, but available to you, in faith? If not, why not? What are you afraid of? Why not claim for yourself this mysterious, undeniable love of God – for you, God’s love for you – expressed, received, and always there for you? In Christ, you are God’s beloved. Why not claim that yourself in every situation – good, bad and indifferent – the mystery of God’s love? Claim it now, and take it with you always. Amen.

### **Pastoral Prayer**

We see the unity of the Trinity, O God, and we desire to live in that same unity. Draw our hearts together, even as we recognize and honor our individuality. Save us from the hopelessness and futility of living life on our own.

You have given us each other for love, support and community. Help us to embrace the beautiful experience of living in community – living for each other and for you – rather than living for ourselves.

And let us begin living for the sake others – for those who are injured, sick, or in poverty, those who are depressed or otherwise carry a heavy burden – let us give of ourselves for them now as we take a moment for silent prayer on behalf of others.

O Lord, we believe that you want to do great things through your church. Unite us that we may together join you in your work, even as we join in the prayer that you taught us, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;  
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we  
forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,  
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever. Amen.**