

Trinity Sunday

## Impossible Things

In Lewis Carroll's timeless story, *Through the Looking Glass*, Alice and the Queen are having a conversation about belief and impossibility:

"I can't believe that!" says Alice.

"There's no use trying.

One can't believe in impossible things."

"I dare say you haven't had much practice," replies the Queen.

"When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour day.

"Why, sometimes I've believed six impossible things before breakfast!"

If you haven't figured it out yet, today is Trinity Sunday—a day devoted, not to one of Jesus' parables or a story from the Bible, but rather to a religious doctrine: the doctrine of the Holy Trinity—a doctrine agreed upon by the early church fathers at the Council of Nicaea in the fourth century as a way to give expression to their experience of the triune nature and activity of God.

There have been times in my life when trying to wrap my mind around the idea of the Holy Trinity made me feel like a child who had given up on believing impossible things.

Have *you* ever felt that way?

I mean, it's one thing to grasp the idea of a Creator God, the God who created the heavens and the earth and you and me. And we are able to make the connection between Creator God being Father God and Jesus being God's Son.

But when it comes to comprehending  
how The Holy Spirit gets fits in as the *third* person of the Trinity—  
well, that's really stretching the ol' noggin.

Talk about impossible things!  
The mere notion of a Triune God is, for many of us,  
as unimaginable as stepping through a looking glass or enjoying tea  
with the Queen!  
What makes matters worse,  
is that the Bible often compounds the problem  
by making it sound like all three of them,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit  
operate independently of one another.

Who are these people?  
How can God the Father be his own Son?  
And if Jesus is God, who is Jesus talking to when he prays?  
And where *does* the Holy Spirit come in?  
Is the Holy Spirit the Spirit of God? The Spirit of Jesus? Or someone  
else?  
If the three are all one,  
then why do they come and go at different times?  
And, finally,  
how can one of them send another of them?  
Impossible things, I tell you; impossible things.

There *are* orthodox answers to all our questions,  
but I have never entirely understood any one of them.  
I do accept them—as earnest human efforts to explain the inexplicable.  
If you have ever looked up into a clear night sky,  
then you know how hard that is.  
You find yourself thinking unthinkable things:

Like wondering what is out there, where does it all stop, and what lies beyond that?

You can't help wondering

who made it all and why;

how a tiny speck of dust like you fits in.

After a while, you either start making up some answers or you go back inside.

Believers throughout the centuries have tried to describe God, but few have been satisfied with their descriptions.

Words turn out too flimsy to do the job.

They cannot be used to paint a true picture of God

because creatures cannot capture the image of their Creator.

The best any one of us can do

is describe what the experience of God is *like*: how it sounds, how it feels, what it reminds us of.

Whether the experience originates from the pages of scripture or events that unfold in our lives,

the best any of us has been able to do

is try to describe what it's *like* to be in the presence of God.

Problem is, though

it's rarely the same experience twice in a row!

Some days God comes as judge,

walking through our lives and exposing all the messes we have made.

Other days, God comes as a shepherd,

fending off our enemies and feeding us by hand.

Some days God comes in a whirlwind who blows all our uncertainties away.

Other days, God comes as a brooding hen who hides us in the shelter of her wings.

Some days God comes as an awesome King;

other days as a silent servant.

If we were to list all the ways God comes to us,  
ours would be quite a lengthy list, indeed:  
God the teacher, the challenger, the helper, the stranger.  
God the lover, the adversary, the yes, the no.

God is many.

This is one of the mysteries behind the doctrine of the Holy Trinity;  
a statement of faith that acknowledges God comes to us in all kinds of  
ways, each as different from the other as they can be.

A second mystery is that God is one.

There cannot be a fierce God and a loving one;  
A God of the Old Testament and another of the New.

When we experience God in contradictory ways,  
that's really our problem, not God's.

We can't explain it.

We can't solve the mystery of it.

All we can do is decide whether or not  
to open ourselves up to a God whose freedom and imagination and  
mercy boggle our minds.

"But *I can't* believe that!" you may say.

"There's just no use trying!"

Ah, perhaps the Queen was right.

Perhaps we simply haven't had enough practice.

Which makes it an incredibly good thing that we here this morning.

That is after all, what *our being here* is all about:

the coming together to *practice our believing*;

to share our stories and our God-experiences with one another;

to delight in the discovery of how the Triune God will inspire, comfort,  
and create in this new day.

“I still have many things to say to you,” Jesus promises,  
“but you cannot bear them now.”

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.”

What a fascinating journey it is we share!

What a gift it has been to enjoy your company along my way!

May the Triune God,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit bless us all!

Amen.