**Understanding Heavenly Things**

Based on [John 3:1-17](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn3.1-17)

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The Holy Trinity

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The social reaction COVID-19 pandemic and panic is now loosening up, or so it seems. The other day was the least number of new cases in Alberta since March, even in the face of an increased capacity to test and identify it. That’s a good thing, because for months, people were told to hunker down and stay home. Social distancing and self-isolation were prescribed to all. But it is a prescription that may have side effects. A virus can threaten the body, but isolation from others can threaten the mind. It is not good for man to be alone. We were created, male and female in the image of God. We are social creatures, meant to be in community with one another. Because God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are in community with each other, and have been before the foundation of the world.

“The Holy Trinity” is a phrase not found in scripture, but it is the most succinct yet comprehensive way to indicate the identity of God. And one thing it indicates is that God is never alone, in isolation from eternity. He did not create us out of boredom. He did not make us in order to have someone to keep himself company in isolation. They say some people have children to cure their own loneliness, but that can lead to unhealthy parenting. Parents should love their children, but they should not be dependent upon them. So too, God loves us, but is not dependent on us to keep him company. God lacks nothing; he does From eternity, from everlasting to everlasting He is God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is one, and He alone is God, but he is never alone. In fact, the proof we have that God so loves the world, is that he gave his only begotten son whom he loves from eternity.

God is always in fellowship within himself...that is the mystery, as we announce it in prayer “To you *alone* O Father, be all glory, honour and worship, together with the Son and the Holy Spirit.” The phrase “to you alone” is followed by “together with”, which is contradictory. Alone means, together with no one. Together with, means not alone. And yet God is one. He is alone, together with the Son and the Spirit.

Imagine in a wedding ceremony, a groom saying, “Forsaking all others, I take you alone to be my lawful wedded wife, together with these other women”. Sometimes my children ask which of them is my favourite and I will say something like “you are my favourite seven year old child”, or some clever way out of prioritizing my love for them. Maybe I should say, “you are my favourite, together with your brothers and sisters.” But even a child would know that I have really not answered their question in a satisfactory way, but avoided answering it.

But in confessing the triunity of God, we are not avoiding an answer. We are confessing a mystery. And it is a mystery revealed, not to our human understanding, but to faith. So in the gospel reading, when Nicodemus says that he doesn’t know what Jesus means in saying “You must be born again”, Jesus says “If I have told you earthly things and you do not understand...how will you understand if I tell you heavenly things?” In other words, Jesus has come to speak heavenly things, and those things require our understanding.

Do you understand the Trinity? The fashionable answer is “no”. Almost everyone Christian, who believes in the Triune God, says they can’t understand it. I get why. It is a confession of humility...to freely admit that they can’t figure out the math of 3 and 1. But I say the answer of the Christian should be “yes.” Yes I understand the Trinity. I understand that God is One God in three distinct persons. I understand this *fully*, and without confusion. I understand the Trinity not by my own reason or strength, but by faith, through the Holy Spirit who teaches me heavenly things through the Word. If you don’t understand the Trinity you are no Christian, certainly no “teacher of Israel”, because Christ came to reveal to us heavenly things such as these.

Jesus reveals heavenly things, but he communicates them through our understanding of earthly things. He doesn’t upload understanding magically. He uses earthly things, he uses things like water and words.

One of the major divisions within protestant Christianity is whether or not you may baptize infants. It really comes down to whether baptism actually provides God’s grace and forgiveness to people. At any rate, those who deny that baptism can save you act like Nicodemus here, essentially pretending to be confused about how baptism works. “*So, your saying that if I pour water on someone and speak the formula they are saved”? That doesn’t make sense.*” Actually, it’s not complicated at all. It is really easy, even on a human level to understand baptism. Yes, you apply water in the Triune name to someone, and God does the rest.

And it’s really that last part that is the heavenly thing. The earthly thing is applying water with the word. This is not complicated. It is easy to understand. The part that is impossible for the flesh is to understand and believe that ”God does the rest”. But He does. Peter says, “baptism now saves you”. Paul says that in baptism you were clothed with christ. He says that we who were baptized were buried into Jesus’s death so that we too might walk in the newness of life. He says he saved us through the holy spirit who was poured out on us generously through our lord Jesus Christ. Water and the words, these are earthly things. Forgiveness, life and salvation, these are heavenly things. Yes, we do the earthly things, but God does the heavenly things through them which save. Through the earthly things that he institutes, through word and sacrament, God imparts heavenly things to our faith through our faith.

Jesus teaches that the kingdom of God is entered through water and spirit. And here is how he teaches it: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. It is an earthly thing to say the triune name. It is a heavenly thing to understand it. God is God alone, but He is never alone but he is always the Father, with the Son and the Holy Spirit. God is never alone, and neither are we. Even when we are alone, we are never alone. God is with us. When two or three are gathered in his name, he is among them. And when you ask for anything in prayer he will grant it. Because he hears you, and reins in your heart and mind through faith. He is your Father, you are His baptized and redeemed child.