

Pentecost 1B, Holy Trinity
Peace, Seattle
May 31, 2015
Romans 8:12-17, John 3:1-17

CALLED INTO THE MYSTERY

Last month marked the 25th anniversary of the Hubble Space telescope, and looking back over those years, it's hard to exaggerate the importance this one scientific instrument has had in revealing the vast mysteries of the universe.¹

Hubble's photographs of space—"cosmic postcards" of unbelievable scale, beauty and detail—have captivated our imaginations. How could we not be mesmerized by iconic images like the "Pillars of Creation" which captures baby stars burning their way out of biblical-looking mountains of gas and dust in a stellar nursery of the Eagle nebula?²

Hubble has helped to confirm and to rewrite much of what we know about this universe in which we find ourselves.

- It's helped fine tune the age of the universe and confirm its ongoing expansion;
- it's enabled us to estimate the number of galaxies and how they form;
- it's taught us where stars are born and where they go to die (hint: in the galactic suburbs);
- it's given us evidence for habitable planets beyond our solar system—and the list goes on.

But at least as important as Hubble's discoveries, are the number of further questions Hubble has prompted and further mysteries it has set before us.

German physicist Werner Heisenberg said the universe is "not only stranger than we think, but stranger than we can think."³

Over 25 years Hubble has given us a taste of this strangeness.

We now know that 95% of the universe is "dark energy"—even though we can't define what "dark energy" is; and that there are at least 200 billion other impossibly immense galaxies beyond our own! Indeed, stars and planets now seem uncountable.⁴

The doctrine of the Trinity, suggests theologian Richard Rohrer, says much the same thing: That God is not only stranger than we think, but stranger than we can think.⁵

Enter Nicodemus who, in today's gospel, finds himself face to face with that very same reality.

Here is a guy with the highest educational pedigree, a scholar and teacher of Jewish law, a revered leader who, this night, in the presence of a much younger rabbi, finds himself grasping at straws.

In the presence of Jesus, his carefully constructed and skillfully honed understanding of God seems to collapse under its own weight and slip through his fingers like so much sand.

¹ <http://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/hubble-25-years-of-wonder-with-discoveries-yet-to-come/>

² <http://www.spacetelescope.org/images/opo9544a/>

³ Werner Heisenberg, *Across the Frontiers*. Richard Rohrer, in his reflection on Trinity, credits Niels Bohr with the quote that comes from Werner Heisenberg.

⁴ From Richard Rohrer, <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Richard-Rohr-s-Meditation--Trinity.html?soid=1103098668616&aid=KCZeS6xSyCk>

⁵ From Richard Rohrer, <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Richard-Rohr-s-Meditation--Trinity.html?soid=1103098668616&aid=KCZeS6xSyCk>

Nicodemus had come to Jesus seeking something, but before he could begin to formulate his question, he found himself being addressed with language he could not grasp.

And when Jesus draws him deeper, calls him into the mysteries of water and the Spirit, Nicodemus finds himself thrashing around just to keep his head above water.

He gets tripped up in Jesus' talk about the necessity of being "born anothēn."

An-o-then (ανωθεν)—is a Greek word, and it's a delightfully ambiguous one. It can mean "anew," "again," or "from above." Nicodemus's efforts to sort all this out intellectually are, finally, beside the point. Only an action "from above"—from God's hand—can enable Nicodemus to perceive what Jesus is saying.

On Trinity Sunday, Nicodemus reminds us that we will never figure God out.

That our relationship with God is not something we can define; it is a gift "from above."

Donna and Clara are being called into the mysteries of water and the Spirit today, and what a fitting Sunday it is for them to enter that water!

Clara – whose name means "light" – was born on the Feast of Epiphany – when the infant Jesus was revealed by the Star in the heavens as God's light. What a connection!

Clara, we can't wait to see how the light God is sewing in you will be manifested in your life; how your star will shine!

And Donna – it's been a long journey, and a hard one at times; full of searching.

But God planted in you a desire to know God and be known by God. And today the Voice of the Lord in, with, and upon these waters affirms what you've always known: that you belong to God.

St. Paul puts it so powerfully in our reading today:

All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God, he says.

You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry ABBA! FATHER! it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

Donna, the Spirit has been leading you toward this day for many years, and we are so delighted and blessed to be witnesses of your rebirth into the body of Christ here at Peace!

There are many things in life we struggle to understand. We go about searching for answers and sometimes those answers never come—or at least they don't come in ways that we can comprehend.

But part of the message for today is that when it comes to this spiritual journey we're on, we don't have to have it all figured out. When we wade in the waters we're invited to wade in the mystery of the Triune God's love for us.

- Love that calls to us when we're still in our mother's womb;
- love that seeks after us until we're found;
- love that invites us to trust that our adoption into God's family is for real, for good, and forever.

In our attempts to explain the Trinitarian mystery, the Western Church has overemphasized the individual "names" for the Trinity, and underemphasized the quality of the relationships between the three persons, says Richard Rohrer.

You can make the names for the Trinity feminine, masculine, or, if you prefer, neutral, he writes. Each naming will have both its strengths and limitations. But the essential point is how the three "persons" of the Trinity relate to one another—and that relationship is one of infinite outpouring and infinite receiving.⁶

When God became enfleshed in Jesus, God's love was poured out for the sake of the world. And it is finally through his life, death, and resurrection that we come to see that abundant flow of love showing forth in a way we can grasp.

Our being born anew or born from above isn't an intellectual construct, but an experience of envelopment in the love of God so complete that only the language of new birth can capture its meaning.

And like all things of the Spirit it is a mystery; not something we can control or something we're in charge of, but something we can participate in by the grace of God.

Today Donna and Clara enter that stream; their lives forever bound in these storied waters to God, to each other, and to us all.

Thanks be to God!

Do I hear an AMEN?

⁶ From Richard Rohrer, <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Richard-Rohr-s-Meditation--Trinity.html?soid=1103098668616&aid=KCZeS6xSyCk>