

Year C, June 16, 2019
Trinity Sunday
Christ Church, Mexia

Today the scriptures suggest to me the topics of wisdom and mystery. This is appropriate because this is the Sunday when preachers normally try to explain the Trinity, one of the greatest mysteries of all. And wisdom is always necessary for understanding, I suspect.

You've heard me speak about wisdom before and hopefully you remember that it is much more than knowledge, and it includes the ability to entertain thoughts and new information and give them reasonable consideration, even though they are totally opposite to that which you may now believe. However, I haven't said a lot about mystery, other than to acknowledge that it is a necessary part of faith. So, let me tell you a story about mystery that was shared by Michael Green (*Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*).

"A fellow was raised in the back hills of West Virginia (years ago) – I mean, so far out in the sticks, (that) never in his life had he seen a big city, to say nothing of modern inventions and neon lights. He married a girl just like himself and they spent all their married years in the backwoods. They had one son, whom they named Junior. Around the time Junior reached his 16th birthday, his dad began to realize it wouldn't be too many years before their son would become a man and would need to strike out on his own. It troubled him that his boy could reach manhood and not have any more options than he had – or worse, that he might leave for a city not prepared to face such a world. He felt responsible and decided to do something about it.

He and his wife started saving for a trip the three of them would take to the city. About three years later the big day arrived. They tossed their belongings in the ol' pickup and started the long journey over winding, rough roads to the big city. Their plan was to spend several days at a swanky hotel and take in all the sights. As they approached the outskirts of town the father began to get nervous about the unknown. So he told his wife that she should stay with the truck when they arrived; he and Junior would look around and come and get her if everything was OK. She agreed.

Flashing neon lights and uniformed doormen greeted them at the hotel. Mama stayed put as papa and Junior walked wide-eyed into the hotel lobby. Neither could believe their eyes – the doors opened

automatically before them. A huge chandelier, which neither had ever seen, hung from a ceiling 3 stories high. There was a waterfall just before the shopping mall full of beautiful stores and shoppers and looking over a rail they could see an ice-skating rink below – inside! – in the summertime.

As they stood taking in all the beauty and grandeur, they heard clicking and bell type sounds behind them. When they turned around, they noticed this amazing small room with doors that slid open from the center. People would walk up, push a button on the wall, lights would flicker above the doors to the various rooms. Sometimes people would walk out of the rooms and then people who had been waiting would walk in, just before the doors would shut “click.”

While standing in utter amazement, a wrinkled old lady entered one of the open doors by herself and “click’ the doors closed. Just a few seconds later, the same doors opened and out stepped a beautiful young woman in her 20s, shapely body, beautiful face, - what (some) might call a knockout. As she stepped out alone, she smiled and walked away. Papa nudged Junior and said, “Go git mama – QUICK!”

Ah, sweet mystery... We often see mystery, as in the story, to be antithetical to knowledge or wisdom. But as Jason Sierra says, “The ability to embrace mystery is not the rejection of wisdom, but the opening of a space for a slow, unraveling, ever-incomplete revelation, the willingness to sit with the reality of a world more complex in each revelation, more detailed and ever new.” And this is very difficult to do because it goes against our human tendencies to want to know and categorize everything, to be able to predict and explain - and our need for certainty at all times. And these tendencies seem to be especially true when it comes to religion, but Jesus is quoted in the gospel today as saying, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” It reminds me of the line from the movie, *A Few Good Men*, when the Marine COL screams, “The truth? You can’t handle the truth!” Though it is much softer, less accusatory, when Jesus says it and then he promises that the Holy Spirit will reveal those things to us in time.

N.T. Wright in his book, *Surprised by Hope*, talks about how science has affected our thinking. In a sense, we are prone to say, “But that can’t have happened because we know that sort of thing doesn’t actually happen.” For example, the bodily resurrection of Christ... Our experience, our science shows that when we die, the body decays until only the skeleton is left. We know that from repeated

observations, which is what science studies – things that are repeatable. Water boils at 212 degrees Fahrenheit, for example. Things that are not repeatable are the purview of history, and history is full of unlikely things that have happened once and only once. Wright continues, "...that faith in Jesus risen from the dead *transcends but includes* what we call history and what we call science. Faith of this sort is not blind belief, which rejects all history and science. Nor is it simply – which would be much safer! – a belief that inhabits a totally different sphere (religion), discontinuous from either (history or science), in a separate watertight compartment (as it were)." Therefore, wisdom and mystery can and do coexist. And that's good.

One last point... When we read a good book, a mystery for example, and we finish, that's it! We know the characters, we know the story, we know the ending. There is no reason to re-read it. But the Bible isn't like that. It is generally about the history of man with God, and it has finite characters and places, finite stories, but when we finish we don't know everything, and, more importantly, we don't know the ending. The story is still unfolding, new characters, like us, and new stories are being added, even though they may not be written in the Bible. And there are plenty of mysteries within the Bible, such as the Trinity, which we cannot solve, cannot explain – at least yet. And in different generations since the Bible was written, new things have been and are being revealed. Even in re-reading the Bible, we can learn more and possibly see things differently, if we use our wisdom. And remember, when we think we know/understand God, we're wrong, because God is beyond our human understanding.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen.