

MARVEL AT THE TRINITY ~ MATTHEW 28:16-20

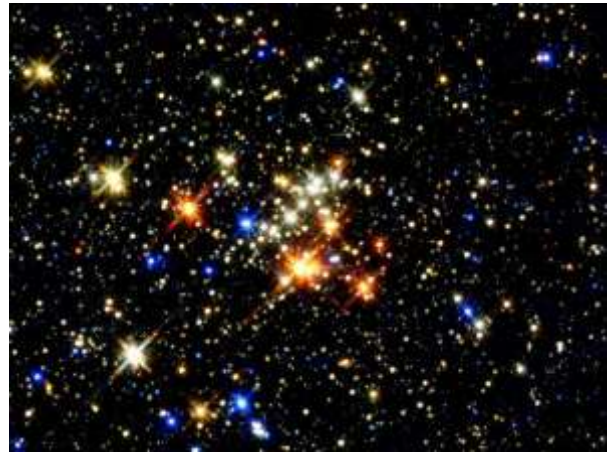
PASTOR COLIN RIEKE ~ JUNE 15, 2014

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."



Grace, mercy and peace are yours through our three-in-one God,

Summer nights are quite spectacular. In Tucson it gives us the opportunity to get outside a little bit and enjoy slightly cooler temperatures. One of the things that I enjoy doing is laying out on my small patch of artificial grass and stare up at the night sky. I don't have to know all of the constellations to be able to enjoy the magnificent view that God has placed before me. Stars beyond number twinkle in front of the black background. You get an idea of what God meant when he said to Abraham that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars. A view like this helps to put in perspective our miniscule place in this vast cosmos. A view like this takes me back to my childhood.



I can remember staring up at the night sky and thinking about how amazing God is. I remember thinking particularly about what eternity would be like. There's nothing with which to compare it. Everything we know has a beginning and has an end. This service has a beginning and an end. This day has an end, this summer has an end, our lives have an end, but not heaven. Heaven just keeps on going. The last stanza of *Amazing Grace* captures it well, "When we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise, then when we'd first begun."

Eternity is just one example of how puny our human minds are. We can explain it, but we cannot fully grasp it. Our belief in the Trinity is another such example. We don't have to know how the trinity works to MARVEL AT IT. And yet, the Bible asks us to take it on faith that God is so far beyond us, and to trust in him. This Sunday, the Sunday following Pentecost, we take time to remember the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Trinity, like other teachings in Scripture, is not just something to explain, but something we believe. We see the Trinity is more than just some "optional" belief we can have. It is absolutely vital to our Christian faith. Even though we may not fully understand it, we must stand in awe and MARVEL AT THE TRINITY.

1. [For faith to trust him](#)
2. [For faith to follow him](#)



God first revealed himself as triune at the beginning of the creation of the world. We just read the creation account from Genesis. God set into motion the world as we know it, and then on the sixth day, before he created man he said, **“Let us make man in our own image.”**ⁱ The first indication that God is more than we can understand. When the Israelites were wandering in the desert, God gave the priests a way to bless the people in a unique, triune, way – **“The LORD bless you and keep you, the LORD make his face shine upon you, the LORD look upon you with favor and give you peace.”**ⁱⁱ Coincidence that the LORD is mentioned three times? I think not. Turn to the pages of the New Testament and you find Jesus’ baptism – Father, Son and Holy Spirit all present.

And then here, just before Jesus ascended into heaven we see him meet with his disciples and give them a commission, a great commission – to **“go and baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”**ⁱⁱⁱ So we MARVEL AT THE TRINITY and for the faith to trust him. Yet, this trust does not come naturally, it must come from God. Because there is something that boggles the imagination, because it doesn’t make sense to the human brain, even for well-meaning Christians. We see that doubt taking place here. The disciples met with Jesus and some worshiped him, while others doubted. What might cause them to doubt this? What might cause them to doubt anything that Christ said?

There could not have been any doubts as to whether Jesus rose or not, because he was standing right there. But they could have doubted that Jesus was who he said he was. They could have doubted that anything would come of this merry band of Jesus’ followers. They may have had doubts about what exactly the messiah would do, because it doesn’t seem like the Messiah they grew up hearing about from the Rabbis. We need only to look at the other instances when even Jesus’ closest disciples doubted. Peter doubted when he denied knowing Jesus three times. Judas doubted he could be forgiven. All the disciples doubted when they found themselves in the middle of a problem – whether it be feeding so many people, or fear of drowning at sea in a thunderstorm. This shows that doubt comes naturally, not faith.

It would be easy for us to criticize these few disciples for their doubts, for their lack of faith, for their lack of trust. But remember, faith to trust him doesn’t come naturally for us either. Our doubt may not be doubting that Jesus is the only Savior of the world, but perhaps something a little bit more subtle. We may subtly doubt what God says in his Word (Yes, Lutherans too!). We may doubt God’s authority – when we think God should do something about this falling-apart world in which we live. We may doubt the threats God gives in his Word – threats to punish sin, one such threat coming in 1 Corinthians, **“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God.”**^{iv} Then Paul goes on to list the specific wickedness he is talking about, wickedness we have committed. Sometimes we even act like we doubt that Jesus came to save us – when we despair over how bad we’ve acted as Christians, or when we want to try our best and then let Jesus ‘cover’ our imperfections.

The thing is, all we do is imperfect! If there is something that we should doubt about, is how we will get to heaven based on our own righteousness (or our righteousness + Jesus’ righteousness). It’s not “us + Jesus” it’s “Jesus, Jesus, only Jesus.” He is the one who covers all our imperfections, even the

imperfection of thinking we are not totally corrupt. He is able to do this by the authority he possesses. To his disciples he said, “**All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.**”^v Think about what those words convey. If what he says is true, then he possesses power over anything, he has the authority to do whatever he wants.

Jesus’ disciples saw limited glimpses of this power on earth – when he calmed seas, when he changed water into wine, when he shone like the noonday sun. But this was limited, where he was going would be unlimited. It would be unlimited because of what he accomplished. He showed his greatest power when he came down from heaven to do what we could not, and die for what he did not. His actions cause us to doubt our own attempts to get to heaven, and have faith to trust him. It is faith to trust what we do not fully understand or cannot fully comprehend. What is it that separates Christianity from other religions? Christianity is not about our devotion to God, but it’s about God’s devotion to us.

(2)

Christianity jives with the world not only on believing the unbelievable, but believing that there is only one right way. Really, if you think about it, there are only two religions in this world. There’s the religion of the law – an attempt to reconcile men to God by their own works, and the religion of the gospel – through faith in Jesus Christ brought about by the Holy Spirit man has attained heaven. Our faith follows the religion of the gospel. This is brought out clearly in the second half of our verses for this morning, “**Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations.**”^{vi}

In a culture that prides itself in the number of choices it can offer, this religious philosophy can come across as hostile, as unloving, as unkind. And yet nothing can be further from the truth. Jesus said, “**I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.**”^{vii} Jesus came to offer a full life. Not a full life here on earth, but a full life with God in heaven. It is this precious truth we baptize all nations into, it is this precious truth that we obey, this precious truth that we guard and keep.

So we MARVEL AT THE TRINITY and the faith to follow him. Jesus gave his disciples the command to go into the world and baptize all nations in the name of the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But that isn’t all. He also said to “**teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.**”^{viii} A better translation for that word “obey” is actually “keep” or “safe guard.” We know there are no laws we need to obey, there is no new law that Jesus has instituted. He is the fulfillment of the law, and we are to safe guard the truth that in Christ, no law condemns us.

This teaching that God is asking us to do rests on more than just the pastors and teachers. It rests on all Christians. We all “**must be prepared to give an answer to the hope that we have.**”^{ix} And this doesn’t just mean saying “Jesus loves you” or “We believe in a triune God.” There’s nothing wrong with these sentences, but if all you proclaim is this, you are not proclaiming all of what Jesus taught. The Apostle Paul said, “**I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.**”^x



We believe in the wholeness of God’s Word, even when there are things that don’t make a whole lot of sense. It doesn’t make a whole lot of sense how God works through baptism to save people, or how Christ’s body and blood is present in the Lord’s Supper. It doesn’t make a whole lot of sense how Jesus was true God and true

man, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense how there are three persons in one God and one God in three persons. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense that if we are saved it's because of God, and if we are condemned it's because of us. All of these things don't make sense to the human mind, and yet they are Scriptural, and these are the Scriptures we must guard.

It might be easy to think that as long as you believe in Jesus it's "all good," and everything else is just optional to believe. But that's not the case. Our triune God wants us to believe, trust and guard what makes Scriptural sense, not necessarily logical sense. This means being serious about God's Word, not apathetic or indifferent. We are to "**contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.**"^{xi} If we don't believe what God tells us about himself – his triune nature, or anything else in his Word, then what good is it to believe in Jesus as our Savior? It would be like a boat's rope not tied on to its anchor, it wouldn't be grounded in anything.

The Trinity is far from being an academic exercise. It's not something that just theologians should wrestle with. It's something that impacts our faith, our life. Just like I don't have to know the constellations in the sky to marvel at all the stars, so I don't need to know how God works to marvel at who he is and what he has done. I can MARVEL AT THE TRINITY, the three-in-one God, who has all authority, who has given us a mission, who is always with us. May we always guard this one true faith, and MARVEL AT THE TRINITY. Amen.

ⁱ Genesis 1:26

ⁱⁱ Numbers 6:24-26

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 28:19

^{iv} 1 Corinthians 6:9

^v Matthew 28:19

^{vi} Matthew 28:19

^{vii} John 10:10

^{viii} Matthew 28:20

^{ix} 1 Peter 3:15

^x Acts 20:27

^{xi} Jude 1:3