

**Enough to Get By**  
by Ellen Williams Hensle, 5/31/26

Well, I know it was not the DuBois family's original plan to have baby Gwen baptized today, but it works out nicely to have a baptism on Trinity Sunday. Last week we celebrated the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and then this week we take time to contemplate the Trinity. We celebrate the triune God: God as three in one and one in three, God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God as three separate persons – not persons as in human beings but persons as in personalities or persons – God as three individuated but utterly interconnected persons who make one indivisible whole. Got all that? If you don't, don't worry – you're not alone. To my mind, the Trinity is one of our most mysterious doctrines. Every time I try to pin it down it slips through my fingers again.

Perhaps that's why it took a long time after the resurrection of Jesus for the idea of the Trinity to develop fully. This idea that if Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, as he says here in Matthew, and if Jesus is one with God, as he insists in the Gospel of John – if these things are true, the early followers of Jesus reasoned, if these things are true then Jesus must *be* God in some way. And if Jesus is somehow God, then the Holy Spirit which is given by God to comfort and animate God's people; if Jesus is somehow God, then the Holy Spirit must also *be* God in some way. Father, Son and Holy Spirit must all be God, and they must all be present in all three forms at all times otherwise the whole thing kind of breaks down, but we must also hold fast to the core belief of our Judeo-Christian worldview, that there is one God and only one God – well, give it a couple hundred years of arguing and some excommunications for heresy and you get this paradoxical idea of one God existing in three persons, three persons distinct but unified, one-in-three and three-in-one.

If we're looking for some guidance on how to understand the Trinity, we won't get very far in Scripture. In fact the Trinity barely appears in Scripture. Most of the places we can find it require us to infer it, as in our Old Testament lesson for today, from Genesis 1. In the beginning, we are told, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and in that beginning a wind from God hovered over the face of the waters. The word for wind and for spirit are the same in Hebrew. So there was God, poised and ready to create, while the Spirit – yes, the Spirit of God hovered over the formless void. And then God spoke. And if Jesus is the Word of God, as again we learn from the gospel of John – if Jesus is the Word of God, then we can read Jesus there, Jesus present at the dawn of creation, present in God's Word echoing out over the waters. Father, Son and Holy Spirit – Creator, Word and Wind of God – all three present together, all three working in harmony to bring creation to its fruition.

Otherwise, if we are looking for all three persons of the Trinity explicitly named together in Scripture, there are just two very brief passing mentions in the New Testament, one of which is here at the end of Matthew. Jesus, following his resurrection, commands the disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – a command that comes without any explanation of what exactly that means and why we should do it, other than that Jesus says to. “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,” Jesus says.

The idea that we baptize in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit seems to come from the Gospel of Matthew, in fact. All other mentions of baptism in the New Testament have the apostles baptizing new converts in the name of Jesus – in the name of Jesus only. But Matthew records it a different way. Perhaps including all three persons of what Christians were coming to understand as the Trinity – perhaps baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit was an important part of the baptismal liturgy that was developing in the worship community that Matthew belonged to, so important that he decided to include it in his gospel. It's hard to say exactly where this Trinitarian formula came from and how it became the standard in churches all over the world. But it is something we share with Christians in every time and place, baptizing in the threefold name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And so in the face of all this mystery, in the face of all we don't quite understand, it is good to have a baptism today. The Trinitarian baptismal formula isn't just something we read in the Gospel – it's something we do, together. As Presbyterians, we believe that the sacraments are visible signs of invisible grace – visible signs of invisible grace. Ordinary water on the forehead of an ordinary human becomes a tangible sign of the mysterious and amazing love of God, poured out for all of us. A way of reminding us that we are washed clean of our sin by God's grace, God's grace offered to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And by the Holy Spirit, God is present with us as we gather; God is present in the life of this child whom we baptize. In the moment of baptism – for a brief moment, the grand mysteries of our faith are made as simple as a palmful of water lifted onto a child's head. For a brief moment, we see God's love acted out – we feel God's love

burning in our hearts. For a brief moment, we have a collective experience of invisible grace, of the Trinity in action. And for that moment, it is enough.

So thank goodness we had a baptism today – thank goodness that in the midst of our puzzling over the Trinity we had the opportunity to experience God’s grace in real time. Together we shared a moment when the invisible became visible, the intangible became tangible, when the mysterious became comprehensible, even if only fleetingly. And if after this we go right back to wondering, we’re not alone. Even the disciples doubted. Here in chapter 28 of his gospel Matthew gives very little time to the emotions and reactions of Jesus’s followers – he’s focused on the weighty words Jesus has to say. But for all the brevity of his description of the disciples’ response to seeing their risen Lord – even in that brevity Matthew takes the opportunity to tell us that as the disciples worshiped Jesus, they doubted. Jesus was right there before them, and they doubted. They too struggled to make sense of the reality of God’s presence in the world.

We’re not alone in our questions or in our doubts. And we’re not alone in the world, either. Jesus’s final word to the disciples is that he is with them always, to the end of the age. As Jesus’s disciples in our time and place, that is his word to us as well: Jesus is with us to the end of the age. The disciples did not have to have perfect faith to receive Jesus’s commission for service; and the disciples did not have to have perfect faith to receive Jesus’s promise of presence. So neither do we. We do not have to have perfect faith in God’s promises or perfect understanding of God’s mysteries to receive Jesus’s promise of constant presence with us, now and always. Total comprehension of the Trinity is not required for discipleship. Neither do we have to have all our questions answered before we can go out and share the good news of Christ’s redeeming love in word and deed. Christ is with us – it is enough.

Of course that also does not mean that we don’t try to understand. Knowing God is with us does not mean we don’t seek the answers to our questions. Knowing God is with us does not mean we stop puzzling over the mysteries of the Trinity, or any other theological problem. A seminary professor of mine, a great scholar in his own right, of the gospel of Matthew, no less – in class my professor once told us that as Christians we need to become more comfortable with mystery. There are many aspects of our faith that are beyond the reach of our limited human understanding – and from his professional experience, in academic terms, many questions we have that we will never be able to answer. So we have to get comfortable with not knowing, comfortable with the idea that some questions have no satisfactory answer, at least no answer that is within our grasp.

But understanding that some aspects of our faith are a mystery does not mean we don’t seek answers, my professor told our class. That doesn’t mean we give up our search. That doesn’t mean we stop trying to understand. We keep asking, keep seeking, keep applying ourselves. We continue pursuing greater knowledge, deeper insight. This is part of what it is to have faith: to become comfortable with the ineffable mysteries of our Triune God, yes – and also to refuse to let mystery be an easy out. We refuse to let an acceptance of mystery stymie our inquiry. As Anne Lamott famously said and as we love to quote here at PCCH: “the opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty.”

On the cover of your bulletin today is a photograph of a stone stele found along the Camino de Santiago in Spain. As you may know, the Camino is an ancient pilgrimage route that begins in France and leads to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, the burial place of St. James, the patron saint of Spain and also of pilgrims. I chose this photograph for its depiction of the Triquetra, or Trinity Knot, a traditional Celtic symbol used to represent the three-in-one nature of the Triune God. But on further reflection, the Camino itself is a helpful image for us today as well. For when one goes on a pilgrimage, one has a destination, certainly – but the destination is only a small part of the pilgrimage experience. The transformational part of a pilgrimage is the journey: building muscles, encountering strangers, receiving hospitality as you go; moving your body and opening yourself to whatever may come along the way; creating space to think big thoughts, ask big questions, ponder life’s mysteries.

So it is for us as we travel the pilgrim journeys of our lives, seeking understanding. Of course we would like to reach the cathedral of perfect comprehension of the divine mysteries. But whether or not we arrive at that destination in our lifetimes, we’ll never get anywhere if we don’t get up and walk. Whether it’s the Trinity or some other deeply incomprehensible aspect of our shared faith, we ask, we seek, we continue to walk toward the goal of understanding, trusting that Christ will be with us always, to the end of the age – and keeping our eyes open for those surprising moments when God’s grace becomes obvious, in water on the human forehead, in a little piece of bread and a little cup of juice, in a startling moment of clarity to be treasured for a lifetime. Visible signs of invisible grace, as we walk our human way. And by God’s grace, may it be enough.