**Text**: **John 3: 1-17**

**The Bethel Pulpit**

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 312 Wisconsin Ave, Madison WI 53703

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty ! Early in the morning…or at 5 pm on Sat. night…our song shall rise to thee ! God in Three Persons: Blessed Trinity !

That is how we began worship today, on this the Sunday of the Holy Trinity: the Sunday when we pay attention to ONE GOD…in three persons. Some of us grew up singing that hymn EVERY Sunday, no matter what the church season was…l see some heads nodding in agreement out there.

ONE GOD: 3 PERSONS.

There ! Got it…easy to understand, right?

Wrong…

Like some of you, I have spent significant time reading and pondering what this mystery called the Holy Trinity is all about, and I cannot get my head around it. It’s a puzzle. This God-question is one of the many that I will some day put before God..and Jesus..and the Spirit, when I see them face-to-face. Like Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, I have to be satisfied NOT to know..to admit that now I see in a mirror dimly…now I know only in part…I have no adequate way to explain…some day, God will show me face-to-face, with a full and clear understanding.

Until then, maybe a picture is better than pages and pages of writing. They say: a picture is worth a 1000 words. So I invite you to look at the cover of your bulletin. A Russian painter…Andrei Rublev by name…in the early 1400’s chose to portray the Father, Son and Spirit concept in this way. Take a moment to look carefully at the painting. Then, turn to the inside of the cover to this much less artistically beautiful depiction of the same concept. Take these graphic portrayals home. You can google Rublev’s name and find some very good details.

For these next few minutes, however, let’s go back to the Nicodemus story in the 3rd chapter of John. Since the phrase “The Holy Trinity” or even the word ‘trinity’ does not appear even once in either the Hebrew Scripture or the New Testament, it’s difficult to find a text that fits precisely with the focus for Holy Trinity Sunday. Some years, we read a few verses from the end of Matthew, where Jesus, just before ascending into heaven gives the great commission: Go…baptize all nations…all peoples …in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Nicodemus, a most-learned man, a ‘teacher of Israel’ is confronted with a similar God-mystery when Jesus tells him that he has to be ‘born again’….or ‘born from above’…in order to get a glimpse of what the kingdom of God is all about.

Whatever else Nicodemus may or may not be, Nicodemus is a very honest man: he bluntly tells Jesus that he has no idea what it means to be ‘born from above’ or ‘born again’. As Jesus talks with Nicodemus, we are never led to believe that Nicodemus ever gets to the point of saying: “Oh, now I understand.”

I think that Nicodemus carries with him, the rest of his life, this huge God-question, trying to figure out what ‘born again’ really means. Nicodemus, similar to you and me with the Holy Trinity question,

has God-questions that don’t get resolved for him in his life-time. Maybe Nicodemus, like me, compiles an entire list of God-questions, reserved for that time when Nicodemus sees God face-to-face and God will clear up the confusion for all of us.

As we leave the 3rd chapter of John, we have no idea what happens next for Nicodemus. He leaves the scene with his questions. Yet, for us, this is not the end of Nicodemus. In the 19th chapter of John, we hear that, not only is Nicodemus present at Jesus’ crucifixion, but he brings aloes and myrrh (in broad daylight!) to anoint Jesus’ body for burial.

I like this Nicodemus’ story. I like the witness that Nicodemus carries for me. Even with all his questions and his honesty to Jesus about NOT understanding this kingdom-of-God stuff, he carries his questions with him, always seeking to stay close to Jesus, even through Jesus’ death.

That story gives me heart and hope. This means that Jesus does not push me aside, even with all my doubts and confusions and unanswerable questions. Whatever this Holy Trinity picture is meant to portray about the mystery of God’s being, it’s ok for me to wonder and ponder and continue to say “I just don’t get it !” and this One-in-Three, Three-in-One God carries me from one day to the next.

Praise be to God !