

Experiencing Divine Relation Sermon

So in the scripture/text this morning, Jesus is talking to His disciples and He is telling them about the future after He is gone. And He says to them "There are things I just cannot tell you; you cannot bear them. So the spirit will come in the future and the spirit will guide you and teach you new things." And so that's fairly important in the Christian calendar because in the Christian calendar today, this is called Trinity Sunday, where we focus on the Trinity. Now, I don't know about you but the idea of a Sunday focused on a theological concept, it's a little abstract like the Trinity, is probably not the most interesting topic you would want to hear about. It's hard to imagine that there was once a time in Christendom that people literally created different denominations and faiths and fought wars over the interpretation of what the Trinity was. There was a time when people fought over that. We're not really in that place right now. As your pastor and a good example of theological ignorance; I went to a good theological school but I'm always amazed as I read and prepare for Sunday with how ignorant I am in Theology and I think our culture is in general, so there's a lot to learn about the Trinity.

Now that said about the Trinity, as it may not be the sexiest topic you ever want to hear in a Sunday Sermon, I was one of those religious nerd kids that actually cared about this stuff. I know, it's hard to believe. What kid is like, scratching his head about the Trinity. But I grew up, as you know, in a more Evangelical Church and I was in fellowship with Christian athletes and I was in the Varsity Christian Fellowship. And then week after week the Ministers would talk about God as a father figure with like a grey beard sitting on the middle throne and Jesus as we know with the dark beard, younger, on the right hand side on another throne; and the Holy Spirit was kind of flying around like Tinkerbell, just like a butterfly, kind of flying around and they would talk about this "Father, Son, Holy Spirit" as three complete Gods almost. And week after week in my church they would say "God got so angry at us, that He was no longer going to accept the lamb sacrifice that people have been giving. "You know how they use to give the lamb

sacrifice in the Old Testament, “And the new lamb had to be His Son. And he was going to bring His Son as a lamb and His Son would be murdered and His blood would be shed and we would be saved.” And week after week we talk about being baptized in the blood of Christ, the blood of Christ, the blood of Christ. As a kid, it just never made any sense to me-it really didn't. I was like this religious nerd and it's actually that topic of all the various things because this is in the Baptist church. My family, Swedenborgian, my dad said "You got to read Swedenborg on this." And that's one reason theologically I became [00:03:05] because I said- "This makes sense-this other idea of the trinity. One sort of, I thought was almost three Gods. And if you know anything about Islam, they view Christians as Polytheists because of the Trinity. They see us as having three Gods.

But Swedenborg, and it's in your program, had a very simple description of what the trinity is and it's basically if you think about it this way: our soul; in the human being is God; the physical body-Christ on earth; and our activity in the world is the Holy Spirit. That made sense to me; that it was one, one God; not three Gods.

And so yes, I was a little religious nerd and the topic of the Trinity was a big deal for me growing up. Now, in Jesus text, it's interesting He's saying "There's certain things I can't tell you now," and you have to ask why, you know. Here He is with the disciples and he can't tell them things but we know that with children when we're growing up, there's only so many things that we can tell at certain ages right? And there are certain things you really want to protect the child from right? They're certain movies you don't want a kid to see. They're not age appropriate. And spiritually there are there that we can't bare, we can't handle that are not spiritually age appropriate. In the history of the world there's been a spiritual evolution. In this text Jesus is saying "Even though I physically am not going to be here, there's going to be evolution, there's going to be spiritual transformation, the world is going to change and new truths, new understandings of God will come to you over the ages. And we know that's true, we can see it in just very basic things. Like the thing that always sticks out for me is slavery. The idea that at one time in

the history of the world in this country not long ago people defended slavery based on their Biblical beliefs and churches defended it and today we would think that's absurd from a spiritual perspective, but people defended it. We've seen the role of women historically, completely change right, in our own lifetime. So things change and evolve and I think that's the unfolding of the spirit that Jesus is talking about that we're more spiritually age appropriate. I remember again, growing up in Sunday school, in fourth grade and my sweet Sunday School teacher was going through the Ten Commandments. And there was one that made no sense to me and that was "*Thou shall not commit adultery.*" I didn't know what it meant. I figured it meant acting like an adult. So thou shall not act like an adult, that's adultery right? So I raised my hand, Mrs. Martin acknowledges me and I said "Adultery, what's adultery? And the sweet Mrs. Martin, her face just- I knew I'd said something wrong, her face flushes all red, she says "Well Richard, that's something you understand as you get older." And I said "But we're learning the Ten commandments, it's one of the commandments, like I have to know." And she said "Well, adultery is when a man Lies with another man's woman." And I went "What? That's wrong. Why would a man want to lie with another man's woman and why would they lie down at all," and I didn't get it. But she was being age appropriate. I was evolving in my own spiritual development; I don't think she could have explained it to me in fourth grade, probably in fifth; Fifth grade I could have handled it because fifth graders know everything. But fourth grade, I probably couldn't have handled it. And so God does that with us, in our own spiritual life and reveals things to us bit by bit. And that's a bit of a mystery- how does that happen?

So recently I was with a friend of mine whose wife passed away and he had a very profound question for me. He said " Okay, my wife's gone, I've read Swedenborg, and I know that he talks about life after death and that's very reassuring, but some people can talk to the dead or the people who've passed or they get revelations from people who've died. Why don't I? Why can't I talk to her? Where's the revelation? How does revelation happen? How do I connect to God? How does a person do that?" He said "You seem like

you kind of download things spiritually, How? How do you do it?" And I thought that was a great question. It's sort of what Jesus is talking about this week when he says "The spirit will come." But He doesn't say exactly how we can be prepared for it. How do we know it's revelation and not something we're making up ourselves? That's a really tough question. I don't think I have all the answers but I'll tell you what I said, you can tell me in our questions period whether it makes sense. But I said "First I think there's three steps. I said I think you have to start with the right motivation. I mean for example wanting to talk to the dead as a séance-er or just wanting to have a spiritual experience for the heck of it, probably not-is not the right motivation. You're motivation must be pure. Then I said "We've got to do what's really hard for our culture, we've got to listen, not talk to God, but listen. That's getting tougher and tougher in today's society. So listening-a practice, a spiritual practice. One of the blessings of my taking this church, is that preparing for a sermon, has become a real spiritual practice because I look at the text at the beginning of the week and it makes no sense, you know all these years of training you think I'd have like, no. And I say "Lord I don't know, give me some ideas, give me some ideas. It's opening yourself up to listening and in fact on that topic, on listening I'm going to challenge anybody who wants to join me this week of finding 15 minutes a day of silence, not prayer, not meditation so much but just silence and listening. See what happens. Anybody, you can tell me at the coffee hour afterward if you're interested in doing it with me and we'll see what happens. But so often we're not open. We're busy. I'm running from screen to screen, computer to car, from walk to meeting. And there's really no chance for God to talk to us and for the holy spirit to present to us. So first is getting the right motivation, second is listening and the 3rd I think is action in the world: go out, make mistakes, try to do good; you'll fail, you'll learn, work with new people, activity in the world.

Now what's interesting after I came up, you know, I thought "That was a pretty good answer and then I thought about it. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. If you think about it, the soul, the body, the activity of the Holy Spirit: Motivation, listening, a spiritual practice, in

the physical body, and our activity in the world. So maybe the Trinity will teach us how we can be open to the spirit.

Amen.