

Figuring Out God

Isaiah 6:1-10

The joy of mastering something: like when we got confident driving a car, or baked an angel food cake that did not sink, or understood how the quadratic equation solved problems in algebra, or how to tie a shoe without thinking about it. So much of our education and training is about learning to figure things out.

But some things can evade us when it comes to figuring them out. If computers are really so easy to figure out, then we would have had them a long time ago. Most of us use them without having any knowledge of how advanced microchips, the heart of any computer, are. Our technology and science is like that. The more we solve and figure out, the more questions we end up with.

350 years ago Isaac Newton seemed to have everything figured out when he came up with a few laws that explained both the motion of the planets and everyday objects around us. No one had thought that what made big things out there move was the same thing that made apples fall out of trees. With Newton's world you could take a stop watch and a ruler and figure out the motion of everything in the world. In fact those same principles were used in the last 50 years to not only put a man on the moon, but a spacecraft on a moon of Saturn.

But along came Albert Einstein who proved that those movements are all relative. Time for us here is not the same as time at the equator or on the North Pole. Your size depends on how fast you are going. What is true for me here is not necessarily true at another location. I can't just figure it all out with Newton's watch and ruler.

Later things got more complex with the discovery of quantum mechanics. The world of planets and stars, which can be explained in an orderly way by Einstein's laws become mass confusion at the level of atoms and things smaller than that. Electrons and light beams act as both particles and waves. The world of quantum mechanics is so bizarre that it seems made up by

some fantasy writer. Yet every experiment we have done has backed up quantum mechanics. We don't have it "figured out," we just know it is the way things seem to be.

It is with that uncertainty that we look today at the Trinity—God as three in one and one in three. In our Old Testament lesson the angels three times sing, "Holy," praise to the Triune God. Paul concludes His second letter to the Corinthians by speaking of the "grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit." Jesus tells us at the end of Matthew to baptize "in the name of the Father, and of Son, and of the Holy Spirit." It seems nonsense. It is if we are trying to figure out God.

The Trinity isn't the only thing about God that seems to make no sense. How can Jesus be both God and human? If God knew Adam and Eve would sin, why didn't He prevent the devil from having contact with them? Why did He allow the vast majority of Native Americans, who numbered in the millions here 500 years ago, die of diseases like smallpox? Why does He allow so many to born in cultures where they know little or nothing about Jesus? We can easily stop and think, "Go figure."

As complex as computers are, there are people who have them figured out. There has to be or else they couldn't be made in the first place. But the whole point of God is that he can never be figured out. You can't put Him under a microscope, or view Him through a telescope, or put Him in a centrifuge to find out what He is made of, or put all the data about Him into a supercomputer to understand Him. If we could, then He wouldn't be God. In the middle Ages the churchmen asked, "Can God make something too big for Him to lift?" If He can, then He is limited. If He can't He is also limited. But He is God.

 This is the symbol we use for infinity. We do math using infinity, but we can't understand it. How

can we when we are finite? If we can comprehend it, then it is not infinity; it is limited, finite. How much more the infinite God is beyond us. In the Old Testament we are compared to the clay that God the potter shapes into useful objects. The clay can no more comprehend the potter than we can God.

The Trinity does not explain God. It does not help us to “figure out” God. Instead it shows how impossible it is for us to do that. But what the Trinity does is allow not to figure God out, but to have a relationship with Him.

In English we are taught that we don’t “speak good,” but “speak well.” There rules that help us to better use the language. We call that grammar. The Trinity is like the “grammar” we use for God. It is not that we figure God out, but that we better use His name when we follow the “grammar” of the Trinity. What we see in the Trinity is how God shows Himself to us as three in one. The “three” helps us to see God and His love for us. God is the Father who loves us like the Father in Jesus’ story of the Prodigal Son. The Son is the one who became one of us to save us from sin. The Holy Spirit is God bringing life into us so that first of all we are alive and then that we become alive again through faith in Christ Jesus.

The Trinity is not to “figure out” God, but to experience Him. A child may not know as much about her mother as I do as an adult. I can probably “figure out” that mother better than the child can. But the child “knows” her mother better; the child has a stronger relationship, more experience with her than I do.

That’s what God wants us to have with Him. If we try to figure God out, then our basis to relate to Him is to try to control Him, like a spoiled child trying to manipulate a parent. But if we can relate to Him, then we learn to trust in Him, rather than try to manipulate Him.

What we can really see in the Trinity is God’s love. If there is anything we see about the Father and the Son, it is their love for each other. Again and again the Father says on the Son, “This My Son whom I love.” And the Son becomes a human and goes to the cross because He loves and therefore

obeys the Father. And the Spirit doesn’t care if He gets any credit because He is so busy lovingly pointing us to Jesus. 1 John tells us, “God is love.” That is what we clearly see in the Trinity.

The Trinity is not something that was spelled out definitively at the beginning of the Old Testament. Some have been led to say about that the Bible shows how people over the years developed the religion. They say the Trinity is something made up by the early church. But it is not that the faith changed, but that it was gradually revealed to us like the layers of an onion coming off. God gradually revealed more and more of Himself throughout the Bible. Why not do it right away? Because it would be too much for us. It would be like trying to teach calculus to a preschooler. It is not that what children learn at a young age is not true; it is just that more has to be revealed as they grow. In the same way God took off the layers of the onion so that what He revealed would not overwhelm people. The Trinity would not draw us closer to God if we did not first experience the Gospel of Christ Jesus, and the Gospel of Jesus would not have its impact if we did not have the Old Testament to set it up.

Our reaction then to the Trinity is the way we can react to God. Instead of trying to willfully figure Him out and manipulate Him, we experience His love and learn to trust in Him. The Trinity helps us do that. One writer says that the Trinity helps God to be “3-D” for us. Something 3-D we can experience more than something 2-D. The Triune God helps us experience more of God’s love for us. That is not something for us to figure out, but to celebrate!

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May 27, 2018
Memorial Lutheran Church and Student Center
Ames, Iowa 50014