

**The Need To Know Basis**  
**Psalm 8; Matthew 28:16-20**  
**Preached by Rev. Dr. Harry Cahill**  
**Babcock Presbyterian Church**  
**Sunday, May 30, 2010**

Today we are invited to contemplate the incomprehensible. As Christians, we believe God is one, yet paradoxically three persons in one. If it sounds like double talk, it's only because the great theologians of the Church have never been able to find the adequate language to describe the indescribable. Cracking that code is an impossible task, as impossible as the ants invading your picnic understanding you.

Be that as it may, whatever we do know about the Trinity is through God's self disclosure through the scriptures, starting with Jesus' final benediction before his ascension, "Go therefore and make disciples...baptizing them in the name of the Father...the Son and...the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19) But God's self-disclosure is measured, revealed purely on a "need to know basis."

That phrase "need to know basis" is usually used by governments trying to restrict sensitive knowledge to the least number of people. It was humorously illustrated in the British comedy "Yes Prime Minister" in a conversation between Permanent Secretary Sir Humphrey Appleby and the Prime Minister's Principle Private Secretary, Bernard Woolley.

Woolley tries to remind Sir Humphrey, "But you only need to know things on a need to know basis."

Sir Humphrey almost shouts, "I need to know everything! How else can I judge whether or not I need to know it!"

Woolley calmly responded, "So that means you need to know things even when you don't need to know them. You need to know them not because you need to know them but because you need to know whether or not you need to know. If you don't need to know you still need to know so that you know there's no need to know.

"Yes," Sir Humphrey thundered triumphantly to which Woolley replied, "Good, that's clear then."

If you're like Sir Humphrey, your need to know the deepest mysteries of the Trinity will leave you feeling left out and frustrated. But you can be satisfied by receiving something even more precious than knowledge, the love of God.

What then do we need to know about God so we can better know ourselves? Let's begin with this, "God is love." (1 John 4:8) That's actually something we really need to know.

God is love. Everything God does is motivated by love. The creation of the universe, even your conception and birth are all acts of God's love. The incarnation, the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of God's only begotten son was the supreme act of love. Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit to comfort, empower and guide mankind is a relentless act of love.

What I've just described to you is the Trinity, the three persons in one God loving humanity through three distinct and mysterious personalities. The Father is the Creator. The Son is the Savior. The Holy Spirit the Comforter. Don't try to understand it. You're not supposed to. If you could understand God, God wouldn't be God. So since you can't understand God all that's left is be loved by God, which I think is the superior alternative.

Something else you need to know about the Trinity. The Trinity is also a three way relationship based on pure love. The Father loves his Son and the Spirit, the Son loves his Father and the Spirit, the Spirit loves the Father and the Son. So the Trinity is an eternal, harmonious, intimate love affair. God is love.

Now here's what's really important to know about the Trinity. When the Word became flesh, Jesus came to invite us to participate in the Trinity's love affair with each other. Think of what that means, we are now included in that eternal, free-flowing love affair that is God. That's why the Father created us. That's why the Son died for us. That's why the Holy Spirit pursues us. So we can be enfolded into God's relationship with himself.

You've heard me say many times, "Christianity is primarily about the quality of your relationships with God, your neighbor and last but not least yourself." This is why Jesus merged the call to prayer "Hear O Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength," (Deuteronomy 6:4) with the commandment "...Love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18) He was showing us how interconnected we are meant to be with God and each other and this interconnection guarantees love.

But, and this is important, we're not just supposed to be loved, we're meant to love back. Yes, being loved by God is a mystical and spiritual experience we should hope for, but if we only want to receive and never give back we deceive ourselves and become narcissistic. Jesus taught love is only real when you risk and sacrifice yourself for the good of the other. "Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:13)

Hopefully you're now wondering, "Then how can I please God and lay down my life for Christ's friends?" That, I think, is the essential question that, left unanswered, keeps us from realizing our fullest potential as God's children and Christ's disciples.

Last Sunday we celebrated Pentecost, when the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples empowering them to be witnesses to the love of the Father revealed through the Son. Prior to this, at his ascension Jesus gave his final instructions, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, to the ends of the earth." That is essentially the message of Pentecost, we are empowered by the Spirit to invite anyone who'll listen to enter into that free-flowing love within the Trinity.

But besides celebrating Pentecost last Sunday the Communications Team hosted an event called the Open Forum. Everyone was invited to communicate joys and concerns, visions and dreams for Babcock Church.

The forum opened with expressions of gratitude to God for blessing our faith community with a strong sense of unity and Christian fellowship. Though it was made clear voicing concerns was encouraged and appropriate no one chose to do so, even though, like any congregation we have our issues that need to be addressed. But I think the Spirit was leading us, at that moment, not to dwell on our weaknesses, but to celebrate our strengths: our devotion to Christ and his gospel, our commitment to each other and our shared desire to grow together into God's love.

Then, about midway through the Forum the conversation went beyond celebrating who we are today to visioning who we can become tomorrow, a congregation reaching out to the community, bringing Christ to people using the resources God has given us, our buildings and grounds and most of all ourselves.

After a report on our long-expected parking lot, voices encouraged opening up our building for concerts, and seminars like instructing teenagers so they can be certified to be baby sitters. There was the suggestion of hosting a coffee house featuring Christian and folk music. I reported we are soon breaking ground for the Community Garden on our property and there was a report on our budding relationship with Pleasant Plains Elementary School and the Outreach Team's goal of recruiting Babcock members to become reading mentors to the students starting in September. Voice after voice expressed the conviction God is moving us into a new chapter in the Babcock story, by being creative stewards of our resources and bringing the love of Christ into our neighborhood.

The next night when the Outreach Team met in my office there was a sense of excitement about the Open Forum. Kathleen Brown said, "I could sense the Spirit moving during the meeting. We experienced Pentecost."

Maybe we can't explain God and get confused when we try to understand God, but all we need to know is this: God is love and God loves us. And then God wants us to share his love even if it means laying down our lives for his friends.

God has blessed us with resources we sometimes overlook. God has given us gifts and talents not meant to be hidden under a bushel basket. God has given us instructions, "Be my witness."

Luke reports just after Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples kept standing there gazing into the sky when suddenly two angels appeared and asked, "Why are you standing there?" (Acts 1:11) with the unspoken message, "You know what you're supposed to do next, get moving!"

Is that same voice speaking to you?

Let's pray...