

“Awesome!”

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[Psalm 29 and Isaiah 6:1-8](#)

On an online discussion forum I check sometimes, preachers gather to discuss lectionary texts with one another. Along with the theological discussions, there are often discussions of other matters, including challenges in ministry and life and suggestions on how to handle such challenges. One week, though, someone introduced a discussion of preaching about the Trinity with the following: “This week, of course, is the one when preachers everywhere try hard to book a[nother] preacher.” This pastor then mentioned the Athanasian Creed, an ancient creed of the church which strongly advocates Trinitarian understandings of God. One translation of the creed has this line: “The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.” The pastor added “the whole darn thing incomprehensible!”

And we might be inclined to agree! The whole darn thing – this business of God being one and God being three *is* incomprehensible. But actually, that is to be expected. After all, this is a doctrine which attempts to explain something about our great and immeasurable God. In some ways, we’ve attempted to make our God too small. We’ve attempted to make our God into something that we can fully wrap our minds around, something that we can neatly organize and categorize and then file away. We’ve lost sight of the awesomeness of God. We’ve lost sight of the mystery of God.

I read on someone’s blog their description of the Trinity. He said this: “The Holy Trinity is difficult to explain—that is why the Trinity is a Mystery.” I wanted to argue back through my

computer screen – “NO!” The Trinity is not a mystery because it is *difficult to explain*. Quantum physics is difficult to explain. That does not make it a mystery. Just because we don’t understand something doesn’t make it a mystery. There are those who *do* understand quantum physics. To them, it is not a mystery. But God is – to *all* of us – a mystery. The theologian Justo Gonzalez says “Trinity is a mystery, not a puzzle. Love is a mystery, a crossword is a puzzle. You try to solve the puzzle, you stand in awe before a mystery.”

We should stand in awe before the mystery of our God, for our God is awesome. *Awesome* is a word which has lost its power. One dictionary lists two definitions for the word. The first definition – “Causing awe or terror; inspiring wonder or excitement” – has a note, saying it is “somewhat dated or formal.” The example sentence for that definition is “The tsunami was awesome in its destructive power.” The second definition, which really seems to be the primary current understanding of the word, is “Excellent, exciting, remarkable.” The example sentence for that definition is “Awesome, dude!” Now, when I say that we have lost sense of the awesomeness of God, I’m really thinking about that older definition, but the newer one applies, as well. We’ve lost a sense of God as causing awe or inspiring wonder, but we also don’t have a sense of God as something “excellent, exciting, or remarkable.” We should be able to stand before almighty God and whisper that God is awesome in His glory. *And* we should be able to shout, God is *awesome*, dude!

Isaiah understood the mystery of God. Isaiah understood the awesomeness of God. His description of his vision of God shows that he viewed God as larger than life. We talk a lot in religious circles about having a personal relationship with God, and I do think that is possible and important. However, in thinking that way, sometimes we are tempted to think of God as just another one of our friends. Our view of God becomes small. We think of God as someone we can

call on from time to time, as we feel like we need to. Sometimes, we treat God as something much less than holy and awesome. Isaiah's vision of God was with angels flying around. The angels were calling out "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." The translation we read says "the pivots on the thresholds shook" which essentially means the foundations trembled with the voices of the angels' crying out about God's glory. Other translations say "At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook" or "Their voices shook the Temple to its foundations."

In response to all of this, Isaiah declares himself unworthy of the spectacle. He says "woe is me – I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips." He understands his unworthiness before God Almighty. All of us are unworthy of God's presence, of God's love, of God's forgiveness. But that is why God's *grace* is such a gift to us! We cannot possibly earn God's love or God's forgiveness, but God graciously gives them to us, anyway. At Isaiah's realization of this, he is forgiven, and in dramatic fashion. One of the angels flies to him with a live coal from the altar and touches it to Isaiah's lips, saying "your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." We all can receive such forgiveness – perhaps without the searing of our lips, but just as dramatically – from God almighty. I think we know that. What I think we forget is how awesome God is and how amazing it is that He would forgive the sins of each one of us.

The Psalmist, too, knew of the glory of God. Hear those powerful, poetic words: "The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic."

So, about that majesty, about that awesomeness, about that mystery...this is where the Trinity comes back in. The Trinity is not something that we can wrap our minds around, but that does not mean that it is not true. Even though we cannot fully grasp the Trinity, this doctrine is

important for us to consider. Now, you can look in your Bibles and see that the word “Trinity” is not actually mentioned anywhere. The theologians who developed the doctrine of the Trinity, however, found its basis in the Scriptures. The God that we understand as a Trinity is revealed to us in scripture in three ways. God is revealed as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, or Father, Son, and Spirit. We use the language of the Trinity not as a way of explaining God, for we can never understand God. We use the language of the Trinity as a way of describing the revelation of God that we have experienced. The idea of the Trinity is to recognize that we see God from three different angles. We first experience God as creator. The opening of the Bible speaks of God creating the heavens and the earth. The first words of the Bible are “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Generally, we understand God mostly as Creator in Genesis, but we can see all three parts of the Triune God early on, as Rob Bell indicates in this video clip from several years ago.

{<https://www.youtube.com/embed/K8JD8sSqYsk?start=42&end=158&version=3>}

Next, we experience God as redeemer, as the eternal Word. We know from the opening of the Gospel of John that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God.” The Gospel tells us that the eternal Word of God, or *logos*, as it is in Greek, was with God and was God. God so loved the world that He sent His only Son...and then, the eternal Word of God, the *logos*, became incarnate in the human being Jesus of Nazareth, who lived and died for us. We experience God as redeemer, as the eternal Word .

Finally, we experience God as sustainer, or Holy Spirit. Last week, at Pentecost, the church spoke of God sending the Spirit upon the disciples. We know that the Spirit of God descended in the form of a dove on Jesus at His baptism. And we know that God’s spirit is now with us always.

We know the Spirit in many ways, with descriptive titles such as Counselor, Helper, Advocate, Comforter, Friend, Sustainer, and Sanctifier.

We experience God in three different ways, and those three ways are all the same God. Three in One and One in Three. No, it doesn't make logical, mathematical sense, but it doesn't have to. God is not limited by mathematics. The Trinity is just one way that we finite humans have tried to understand, to some degree, our infinite God. It is a mystery, in the best sense of the word. It is another way that our God is holy, awesome, and majestic. We should not try to understand God by only using logical, rational thought. God is limitless, eternal, immortal, and far above and beyond our understanding. To live in relationship with God, however, we must strive to understand what we can of the nature of God. The doctrine of the Trinity is one attempt at that. Can we figure it out logically or mathematically? No. Does it truly make sense to our finite minds? No. It is only one way for us to attempt to describe our experience with God, even while knowing that our descriptions will never be sufficient. Yet, we go on, striving for a closer relationship with God, who truly can only be described as Awesome! Amen!