

“A Big Enough God” (Psalm 46:10) Trinity Sunday, May 30, 2010

I'm no scientist, but even I know that amoebas cannot think, much less talk. Still, I'd like to begin today imagining that they could. And what might they talk about? For our purpose today, let's imagine what they might say about human beings.

Just to set the scene, picture a group of amoebas listening to three experts debate whether human beings exist, and if so, what we are like. First, there is the skeptical amoeba, who says there's no such thing as human beings. “Enormous creatures composed of trillions of cells – and many different kinds of cells at that? Nonsense! We all know that life only exists in single cells. Plus, if human beings exist at all, why haven't we ever seen any? Especially if there are supposed to be so many of them! And as for the notion that they come in two different genders – ‘male’ and ‘female’ – who can believe that? Or this ridiculous notion that both genders are required for reproduction? Everyone knows that if you want to have kids, you just split in two. It's really quite simple! So let's be scientific, not waste our time with mystical mumbo-jumbo!”

In response, a “middle of the road” amoeba chimes in. “I agree that the legends about humans cannot be *entirely* true. Still, to deny that humans exist at all? That's going too far! Most likely, human beings are one-cell creatures like us, just a bit larger. Science has proven that we amoebas can grow quite large. Why not other life forms, too? Compared to us, humans may be enormous – perhaps as much as an inch tall. But as for the rest of what we've been taught, we need to demythologize a bit. Simple logic proves that a creature cannot be made up of more than one cell. How can $1 + 1 + 1$ still equal one? And as for there being two distinct genders – that's just bizarre; more like science fiction than reality. But let's not be narrow-minded. My position is the most logical one. I do believe human beings exist, but they are probably just very large single-cell creatures much like us.”

Now, finally, the third amoeba gets to speak – defending the traditional view of humans. “Colleagues,” it says, “with all due respect, your arguments don't seem scientific or logical. Just because the traditional view goes beyond what you understand does not mean it isn't true. Or are you under the impression that reality is limited to what you personally can understand? You appeal to science. Has science disproved the traditional view of humans? No. And who knows what science will yet discover? After all, there was a time when amoebic science claimed that *no* other life forms existed. We were the center of the universe! Then we discovered bacteria – very different from us, but still a life form. Then we discovered viruses. The jury's still out, but they too seem to be a life form. And who's to say there aren't many more life forms in this great big universe – *even* some composed of more than one cell? Just because we cannot imagine something doesn't mean it cannot exist! It just reminds us how limited we are, and that there are mysteries mere intellect will never grasp. What's needed is a sense of wonder, awe...and humility. After all, we are just amoebas!”

“Okay,” some may be thinking, “*fun story, but what’s your point?*” And actually, there are many ways we could apply the story, aren’t there? But for our purpose today, the point is about God: how we approach the mystery of God and how we should never limit God to what we personally can understand. We may laugh at the attitude of the amoebas, but the truth is: *amoebas would have a better chance of figuring out us than we have figuring out God.* I mean, in the total scheme of things, the difference between us and amoebas is about this much [thumb/forefinger]. But between us and God? There’s an infinite difference! And this seems especially worth emphasizing today as we celebrate Trinity Sunday. People can work so hard trying to “solve” the mystery of the Trinity or disprove it “logically.” How can 1 + 1 + 1 equal one? But frankly, that is the least of our challenges! How do we figure out what it means for God to be infinite? How do we figure out what it means for God to be eternal? How do we figure out what it means for God to be all-knowing, all-loving, all-powerful, and ever-present? Talk about mystery! There’s no way our brains can grasp any of that!

And this is as it should be! After all, we are just human beings! A god so puny that we could fully understand him wouldn’t be much of a god – certainly not a big enough god to deserve our worship, trust or obedience! For God to be God, He must be bigger than anything we can imagine! He must be bigger than the universe He created! He must be bigger than life, bigger than death, bigger than what we call reality itself. And my friends, our God is that big! The God we worship, trust, and obey is that big! And because He is, He is also big *enough* – that’s the good news: God is big enough to sustain us through whatever we face in this life; big enough to guarantee us an eternal life beyond. So as we approach the mystery of God, what we need is not narrow-minded skepticism but a sense of wonder; not our limited logic but a sense of awe; not intellectual arrogance but a sense of humility – humility that allows the mystery to be a mystery; humility that accepts the mystery, finds comfort in it, even sees it as proof that we have a big enough God. In short, as we stand before the divine mystery, we need to do what God invites us to do in Psalm 46: “**Be still and know that I am God.**”

Now, I know this doesn’t come easily or naturally. God created us with a hunger for understanding. And that’s a good thing...when practiced with humility. But when we contemplate the mystery of God, there are two dangers we need to watch out for. The first I’ve already mentioned: the temptation to whittle God down to something we can understand. And the other danger? Getting so wrapped up in our thinking *about* God that it gets in the way of relating *to* God.

Here’s a telling example. Years ago, when I first started teaching basic belief classes, I wanted to make a good biblical case for the doctrine of the Trinity. So I listed verses where the Father is called “God,” and ones where Jesus is called “God,” and ones where the Holy Spirit is called “God.” Then I also listed verses that said there is just one God, and verses that show the interaction of the three persons as one God – all to make the point that God is one Being in three persons, a Trinity, just as we confess in the Nicene Creed. Now, I was prepared

for people to question how this can be. How can God be triune? How can 1 + 1 + 1 equal one? And I was prepared to answer that the Trinity is a mystery. This is just how God has revealed Himself in Scripture. But then came a comment I was not prepared for. An elderly woman, who was just there accompanying a friend, told us, *“The doctrine of the Trinity doesn’t have to be confusing. It’s only confusing when we’re talking about God. When I’m talking to God, there’s no problem at all.”* And when asked to explain further, her answer made perfect sense. *“When I pray ‘Our Father, who art in heaven...’ I know I am praying to God. When I pray ‘Come Lord Jesus, be our guest...’ I know I am praying to God. And when I pray ‘Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me...’ I know I am praying to God. There’s no confusion. Three persons, one God. It all makes perfect sense when I’m talking to God.”*

She was right, of course, and I think there is an even deeper truth in her words: that instead of just thinking about God – in the abstract – we must relate directly to God – focus on Him directly, personally, relationally. Not only does that make for less confusion, it’s also what makes faith faith.

Think about this in terms of human relationships. Suppose a young man falls in love while he’s away at college. The parents hear glowing reports about the girl friend. Their son sends pictures of her. He writes detailed e-mails about her. Obviously, he’s in love; he’s not usually that communicative! But at this stage, they only know about her. And frankly, what they know about her is confusing. For one thing, there seem to be contradictions in her personality. Their son describes her as an introvert, yet talks about how social she is. He describes her as “practical,” yet talks about how much she loves to shop. He describes her as “down-to-earth,” yet talks about some very idealistic dreams she has. And on top of all that, she just doesn’t seem to be his “type.” Well, it goes on like this for several months until finally the son brings his girl friend home to meet his parents. And as they get acquainted with her, what a different impression! Instead of an abstraction, they’re now face to face with a person. As for the contradictions, things now start to make more sense. What was confusing about the girl friend – and the relationship – is now getting cleared up. And why? Because now they know her, not just about her.

And if that’s true in human relationships, how much more is it true in our relationship with God! Yes, we need to know about God. That’s why we study the Bible. That’s why we learn Christian doctrine. That’s why we...listen to sermons. We need to know the truth about who God is, and how we stand before Him, and why we need a Savior, and what God has done to save us. Spiritually, we won’t get very far if we don’t know the truth about God.

But by the same token, we won’t get far enough if we only know the truth about God. For faith is more than that. Faith is knowing God Himself – not just knowing about God, but knowing God Himself directly, personally, relationally. And for God to make a difference in our lives, we need to know Him directly,

personally, relationally. So that is where God invites us to focus. Not on metaphysics. Not on unanswerable questions. Not on how $1 + 1 + 1$ can equal one. Focus on God Himself. He says, **“Be still and know that I am God.”**

And isn't that a great reminder to take home with us this Trinity Sunday? We all know the temptation to whittle God down to where we can understand Him, but a whittled-down god will never be big enough to get us through tough times in life. We all know the temptation to focus on abstract ideas about God, but an abstract god will never be big enough to comfort, encourage, or inspire us. Only God Himself is big enough. And we know God Himself. We have a faith relationship with God Himself. That is what ultimately matters! So what if we aren't able to figure out God? What matters is that He's got us figured out! So what if we don't understand the mystery of the Trinity? What matters is that the Trinity understands us; understands what we most deeply need! God holds us in the palm of His hand. He loves us with a boundless love. He **“is able to do abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.”** He has forgiven our sins and guaranteed us eternal life, all as a gift of grace. That's what we know! That's who we know! So why fret over what we cannot know? God has a better idea: **“Be still and know that I am God.”** Amen.