

It's a curious thing Jesus says today:  
*I still have many things to say to you,  
but you cannot bear them now.*

Well, then when?  
When can we learn what we need to know?  
When can you tell us what you need to say Jesus?  
And what is it?  
What are the many things he has left to say to us?

Every week in Bible Study,  
inevitably,  
someone asks,  
“Well what on earth does that mean?”

We dig  
and we talk  
and we ask,  
and we wonder.  
Really we wander around,  
trying to understand the world when the Bible was written;  
hoping to understand our own world,  
just that little bit better.

It's fun; mostly.

It would be awful if we were alone.  
It would be dreadful to dig around in a 2,000 year old book,  
asking, “What on earth does that mean?”  
if there was nobody else to guess with,  
nobody else to wonder with.

I'm sure I've said this in Bible Study,  
and I've probably said it in this pulpit.

My mentor Roger said it better than I ever could,

*The word **God** is only a symbol for God*

*If that doesn't make sense,*

*think about this:*

*the word **pulpit** is only a symbol for pulpit.*

*I can say the word, picture it in my head, all I want -*

*but it is a symbol and only a symbol*

*for the place I can stand and lean and touch.*

**God** is only a symbol for God.

And he was right.

God, is just a word.

Words matter,

they have power,

they have meaning.

But they are not the thing that they describe.

The world Allen conjures for you a nearly 40 baldheaded priest.

Might call to mind another person,

maybe even someone who spells their name wrong, A-L-A-N.

Either way, Allen or Alan,

it's just a word,

just a name.

You can use it to get my attention,

you can use it to talk about me,

but it's not me.

Same goes for God.

Even YHWH.

The name for God given in Exodus;

the name that was unutterable.

It's important, powerful even.

But it's not God.

It's just a name.

What happens when the way that we name God,  
the ways that we talk about God,  
get confused with *God*?

What happens when you try to take God  
and make God concrete,  
something you can hold in your hands,  
something we can make sense of?  
What happens when you take that idea of God,  
that concrete image  
and you start to worship it?

Well, that's an idol.  
Something you worship, other than God?  
That's an idol.

*I still have many things to say to you,  
but you cannot bear them now.*

I'm still not sure what he means.  
But I wonder if part of it  
is to just give us permission *not to know*.

You've read the Bible cover to cover?  
You've heard all the words of Jesus 10x over?  
And you still don't get it?  
You still fall short  
of where you think God might be calling you to be?

That's ok.  
Because there's more.  
There's more to the story.

Today is Trinity Sunday.

I once heard our beloved Jane Dorman  
give a truly terrible sermon on Trinity Sunday.

She didn't preach much,  
didn't like to,  
and only did it as a favor to me.  
Bless her.

She gave a few powerful sermons.  
But Trinity Sunday was not the right day for her to preach.

You remember Jane.  
And if you never met her,  
let me tell you what I mean.  
She was the kind of lady  
who needed you to understand exactly what she meant when she said it.  
Nuance was not her forte.

If the back cross was supposed to be in a certain spot,  
the person carrying it NEEDED to be in *that* spot,  
every...single...time!

And when you start talking about the Trinity.  
When you start saying that God is three AND one.  
When you start saying that God is a contradiction in terms,  
that God is an equation that won't square,  
well, what you are saying  
is that God is not going to be in the same spot  
very often at all.

I've seen all kinds of images for the Trinity over the years.  
Carvings in ancient cathedrals,  
diagrams in theological textbooks,  
all kinds of stuff in all kinds of places,  
but nothing any better  
than the image printed on your scripture insert.

What does it mean?  
These three interlocked shapes?  
Your guess is as good as mine, really.

It seems to mean that God is hard to pin down.  
It probably means that a simple drawing  
says a lot more clearly who God is  
than a 2,000 word theological essay.  
I would say it means that God is ok  
with us having a whole lot more questions  
than we do answers.

Timothy Beal, professor of religion at Case Western Reserve says it well,  
*The Bible is not a book of answers, but a library of questions.*

When is the last time you found a good question,  
and stuck with it?  
When is the last time you heard a good riddle,  
and chewed it over?

My grandfather told me a riddle once.  
What it was is sadly lost in the mists of time,  
but he told me a riddle.

As soon as he said it, I replied back, "I don't know, what?"  
And he said, *No, pardner.*  
*I'm not gonna tell you the answer.*  
*You've got to figure it out for yourself.*

It's like a treasure map.

X marks the spot.

But where is X?

What is the land like when you get there?

How fast is the river you have to cross to get there?

What language will you have to speak to be understood?

*I still have many things to say to you,  
but you cannot bear them now.*

Lawrence Raab wrote in his book of poetry,

“The History of Forgetting”, this line,

*Once a trip of a few miles*

*might have turned into a grand adventure.*

Where is your grand adventure?

It does not have to be across the sea,  
or through the desert.

It doesn't have to cost you very much at all.

Only your own self,

only your own life,

only that which you never earned

but was only given to you - pure gift.

Grace.

Not cheap,

never cheap,

but always free.

Where is your grand adventure?

Perhaps our adventure will lead us

into the heart of what it means

to follow a God who is born, crying and helpless,

into the heart of what it means

to follow a God who is a burning flame

and a Holy Comforter, all at once,

into the heart of what it means

to follow a God who is the creator of the universe

and the ground of all being.

Where is your grand adventure?

I believe it will lead us

into the heart of what it means

that God is all of those things,

and even perhaps more.