

Stewards of the mysteries of God

Preached by Reverend Carmen Garrigan

Associate Pastor for Youth

Kirkmont Presbyterian Church

January

Text: 1 Corinthians 4:1-5

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we praise you for Your graciousness to us Your creation. You are the Potter, we are the clay. We ask that you would use our time in Your Word this morning to shape us and mold us into worthy vessels of the treasure of the gospel. Grant us ears to hear and willing hearts. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

My husband Sean and I have found that we are both quite good at asking each other unanswerable questions. Or at least questions that are beyond one another's field of knowledge and expertise. We will just be going through the motions and routines of everyday life and seemingly out of no where one of us will pose a really complex question to the other. When we had a full moon the other day I asked Sean, "Is the moon full for just one day or for a few days, or is the variance over a three day period too hard to discern with a human eye?" Not long after Sean asked me, if the lunar cycle is 28 days, shouldn't a full moon always fall on the same day of the week? But yet it doesn't seem to.

When we closed on our house we also had a lot of questions. Neither of us could figure out the escrow thing. All of our other bills we are allowed to pay from our checking account on our own. Why do we have to pay someone to pay our mortgage and property tax for us? Hey, if we wrote into law some other weird holding account, say for cell phone bills, we could make a lot of money!! I have always thought that clouds move way faster in New Jersey and Ohio than they do in California. Why is that? When we try to make sense of the new streets that are yet to be built in our development Sean asks me where our street name ends and where the one connecting to it begins. I'm curious about why dandelions don't die in freezing temperatures. Sean wants to know why the word acronym is so long.

We have learned that when one of us poses such a query it is best to say, "That is a really good question." For a while I thought I was really supposed to come up with answers for inquiries that were truly beyond my realm of understanding. I would end up frustrated and had to reign in my urge to say, "How am I supposed to know, I am not an astronomer, plumber, city manager, banker, etc." or whatever professional that deals with such things. Or in these days shout, "I'm not wikipedia!!"

Instead, we have learned to embrace the mystery of things we can not understand or explain. It is much more enjoyable to sit back together and marvel at the mysteries of the world rather than to wound each other with the frustrations of what we do not understand. God has given us many mysteries to consider that are far weightier than scientific trivia or the legal intricacies of real estate. Scripture teaches us that God's plan for salvation is

a mystery (Ephesians 1:9, 3:4, 5:32; Colossians 1:26-27, 2:2). Certainly, there are many aspects of God's plan that He has graciously revealed to us. He prepared a people for the coming Messiah through the prophets of the Old Testament. Jesus the Son, revealed the Father to us through the incarnation, and the Holy Spirit reveals God's Word and the ongoing work of Christ to us. Yet the unfolding of many aspects of this plan is a complete mystery to us.

Why did God choose Israel, out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, to be his treasured possession (Deut. 7:6)? The mystery of God's sovereign choice. Why was there over 400 years without a word through the prophets before the Messiah came? We can trust that God was orchestrating perfecting timing in the coming of His Son, but the why of the timing is a mystery to us. Of all the fishermen in the area of Galilee, why did Jesus choose the ones that He did to be his first disciples? He had insight into their hearts and character that we do not have, yet they were sinners just like ourselves. Still, we see the beauty of God's plan unfolding through His gracious choice.

When will Christ return to consummate the work He began? We know that the time elapsing is so the most people possible will have the opportunity to hear the gospel and to repent (2 Peter 3:9). But the particulars of the Father's timing are information that He alone holds. Why do some people respond to the gospel with such openness and then persevere in their discipleship, while others take a lifetime of the prayers of others before their eyes are opened to the mystery of the faith? Such questions cause us a great deal of perplexity. Yet in God's eyes nothing He does is too early or too late. When we ponder these deep things of God and what He planned we cannot keep from saying with the Apostle Paul ascriptions of God's praise and glory. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3)."

Though sometimes, for a season, the mysteries of God cause us great pain. As Job sat in the grief of losing his children, the pain of the sores that covered his body, and the condemnation of his friends, he questioned the goodness of God's plan. Job's grief regarding what his life had become caused him to curse the day that he was born. He wished that it would disappear into the mouth of the leviathan or that he had been a stillborn child instead of having a mother to nurse him. Job declares the intensity of his sorrow to God: "I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer; I stand up, but you merely look at me. You turn on me ruthlessly; with the might of your hand you attack me. You snatch me up and drive me before the wind; you toss me about in the storm" (Job 30:20-22). Job also recalls his righteousness before God. He asks God to show him what he did to deserve such great distress in his life (Job 31).

Yet rather than answering Job's questions directly, God speaks to the mysteries that confound Job by revealing to Him an even greater mystery and even larger complexities. From the storm God's thundering voice is heard: "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me" (Job 38:2-3). Then God asks Job where he was when the world was created. Can Job tell him how everything was made and how the life of all creatures is

sustained? God's questions for Job far out rival any that Sean and I have asked each other.

These are just a few of God's questions for Job: Job 38:19, "What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside?" Job 38:22, "Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail." Job 38:25, "Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and a path for the thunderstorm...?" Job 38:32, "Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons or lead out the Bear with its cubs?" Job 38:34, "Can you raise your voice to the clouds and cover yourself with a flood of water?" Job 38:35, "Do you send the lightning bolts on their way? Do they report to you, 'Here we are'?" Job 39:1, "Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn?" Job 39:26, "Does the hawk take flight by your wisdom and spread his wings toward the south?" Job 39:27, "Does the eagle soar at your command and build his nest on high?" To all these questions that God asks of Job, Job responds with the only appropriate response: "I am unworthy - how can I reply to you?" (Job 40:5). Job found his comfort in humbling himself before God, recognizing that he spoke of things he did not understand, things too wonderful for him to know (Job 42:3).

When we grapple with the pain of our unanswerable questions, God often brings relief not in unraveling the whys that trouble us, but by revealing to us an even greater glimpse of His wisdom and majesty. When we dare lift our eyes to gaze at the glory of God, we are caught up in such a great mystery that all of the other mysteries that haunt us pale in comparison.

God says of himself that his understanding no one can fathom. He calls us to set aside our idols and our understanding to worship him. When God speaks through Jeremiah about his matchless worth, Jeremiah the prophet says to the people: "God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding. When he thunders, the waters in the heavens roar; he makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth. He sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses. Everyone is senseless and without knowledge; every goldsmith is shamed by his idols. His images are a fraud; they have no breath in them. They are worthless, the objects of mockery; when their judgment comes, they will perish. He who is the Portion of Jacob is not like these, for he is the Maker of all things, including Israel, the tribe of his inheritance—the LORD Almighty is his name" (Jeremiah 10:12-16).

God's reveals that the immensity of His love for His people is wider and deeper than our vastest ocean or the expanses of space (Psalm 33:5; Psalm 36:5-6; Psalm 57:10; Psalm 103:10-12; Ephesians 3:18). Yet the most profound mystery is why a God of such greatness would stoop to humble himself in human flesh. The glory of the one and only, full of grace and truth, has made known to us the Father (John 1:14) and has shown us the depths of God's love and the awesomeness of God's wisdom (John 1:16, 15:13). God showed his love for us in this way: while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong" (1 Cor. 1:27). When the world clamored for justice through their own hands, God showed us mercy.

Why would the Maker of heaven and earth descend so low to die for sinners? This my friends, is the most beautiful of all mysteries: God's love for us.

This is the mystery that God has called us to be stewards of. A steward in the context of New Testament times was someone who was entrusted with overseeing and caring for his master's property for an extended period of time. In God's grace He has given us that same privilege as His Church. God has entrusted us with the mystery of faith and of salvation in Christ and God has called us to reveal this beautiful mystery to the world. God has given us the same means as He himself used: love.

God has given us the fullness of His love to make known among all peoples. God's love is reconciling. God's love is healing. God's love brings salvation and deliverance. God's love is perfect justice. God's love is without boundaries. God's love is truth. This love, in all its mystery, is what we have been called to be stewards of. We don't get to change the message to suit our own likings or the climate of our culture. We can't modify the gospel to be convenient for ourselves. However, we are given the immense privilege of embodying this message so that the world can see God's perfect love in human form.

We are sent to proclaim this perfect love as Christ himself did during his earthly ministry. The mystery of being God's stewards does not end with the content of our role, but it continues as we recognize that we are not only called to be imitators of Christ, but that we are called to be in union with Him. We are not faithful stewards through our own ingenuity but because we are united to Christ in his death and resurrection. Christ died for us. Christ rose for us. Christ ascended into heaven for us and Christ prays for us. That God would go to such lengths to draw us to Himself and to enable us to participate in His ongoing ministry is a profound mystery. This love is not a selfish love, but the most incredible love of all: God's perfect love through the one man, Jesus Christ. This perfect love is given to us so that we would have a glimpse of God's glory, and in seeing His glory be lost in wonder and awe.