

Easter Sermon Series: *It Doesn't Happen Overnight- "A Mystery"*
Salem United Methodist Church
John 15: 9-17; 1 John 5:1-6
May 10, 2015
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This is the last sermon of our Easter Sermon Series, "It Doesn't Happen Overnight," which refers to the process of new life. The topics of this sermon series were taken from the song called, "The Hymn of Promise," by Natalie Sleeth. She describes the new resurrected life we receive in this world and eternally as the flower that grows from a bulb, a tree that grows from a seed, and a butterfly that waits to be free of a cocoon. Science can describe how all this happens, however, new life in any form is still a mystery, something God alone can see.

Most of us love a good mystery no matter if it comes in the form of a novel, play, TV show, or movie. Those of us who love mysteries love the intrigue and how it stirs the imagination. We love to look for clues to solve the riddle or guess who-dun-it. A good mystery keeps the reader or viewer hanging until there is that little twist at the very end. Then when the solution or murderer is revealed, we sit back and say, "Ah, I thought it was..." or "I never would have guessed that!" or if we are really good at solving puzzles, we might exclaim, "I knew it all the time!"

A good definition for the word, mystery, is anything that is kept secret or remains unexplained or unknown. We described the mysteries of nature in this introduction. But mysteries don't happen just in nature. God is a mystery to us and so is faith. We proclaim this mystery in our communion liturgy. We call it "the mystery of faith," as we state "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again." We know this, yet it remains something that is difficult to explain. Faith is faith because it is something that is unseen and unknown. Faith is the hope that the unknown will be made known. By faith we know that a flower will come from a bulb. By faith we claim that from the past will come the future, in our death a resurrection, at last a victory, but it all still remains a mystery. How does this happen? This is where we can't rely on science. And is the reason why many cannot claim a faith in God. We cannot explain yet scientifically God or faith. Faith is a mystery. God is a mystery. God in human form as Jesus is a mystery: his birth, his human presence, his death and resurrection. How does someone die and be resurrected? Through modern science we can resuscitate someone, but resurrection is still a mystery. The resurrected Christ is a mystery to us. Jesus could physically be touched and he could eat, yet he had the ability to appear in a locked room. All this is still scientifically impossible. The Resurrection of Jesus remains unexplained. And then there is the whole mystery around our resurrection. When does it happen? Right after death or does it happen at the end of time? Some people will not have their bodies cremated because the Bible claims that on the last day the dead will rise from their graves. For others their faith holds that we are with God immediately when we die. We really don't know. Our resurrection is a mystery that we claim by faith.

Another mystery is the Holy Spirit. Next Sunday we will celebrate the Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church. How does God come to us in Spirit? How does the Holy Spirit touch us and change us? We really don't know. It is unexplained. However, like any good mystery, we are given clues. The Bible is filled with them, clues about God, clues about Jesus, clues about the Holy Spirit, and clues about this mystery of faith. Karl Rahner, a twentieth century German Jesuit theologian, identified these clues as holy transcendence. What does this term, holy transcendence mean? By definition, transcendence is something that is beyond the limits of all possible human experience and knowledge. We, as humans with our limited intelligence cannot comprehend or fathom who God is or what God is all about. Yet God by giving us clues enables us to experience and receive the knowledge of God or holy transcendence which is also a mystery. How does God allow us access? Why does God allow us access? That's a mystery, too! Thus, Rahner calls God, the Absolute Mystery. God as the Absolute Mystery, Rahner claims is complete. In comparison, humans are incomplete. As we access God by the way of this holy transcendence, we begin to become complete or we could say the clues begin to come together. The

puzzle pieces begin to fit. When we access the holy transcendence of God, we come to know love in its purest form. And this leads us to both of the “John” scriptures for today.

In Jesus’ discourse to his disciples in the Gospel of John before his Crucifixion, Jesus is making one last stand to teach about God. This “little talk” of Jesus is the longest talk in the Bible. It is five chapters long. In these chapters Jesus offers one clue after another about the Absolute Mystery of God and how we can access this holy transcendence. That access is love. God loves us. God loves Jesus. Jesus loves us. We will remain in the love of Christ when we love each other. Jesus feels so strongly about this he makes it into a command: Love each other. When we love each other, then God’s love grows in the world as fruit grows. The writer of the first Epistle of John echoes the words of Jesus. He states, when we love God and keep his commandment of love, we will love all God’s children. It is our accessibility to this transcendent love then defeats the world. And that truly is a mystery to us when we witness all the evil and harm that we as humans do to each other.

Even with all the ways we harm ourselves, God doesn’t deny accessibility, but continues to offer us access to the Holy Mystery of Divine Love. There was a story written by Temple Baily and published in 1933 for Good Housekeeping magazine. This story gives us a glimpse into this Absolute Mystery of God’s love. A young mother asked as she set her foot on the path of life, “Is this the long way?” And the Guide said: “Yes, and the way is hard, and you will be old before you reach the end of it. But the end will be better than the beginning.” The young mother was happy, and she would not believe that anything could be better than these years. So she played with her children, she fed them and bathed them, taught them how to tie their shoes and ride a bike, and reminded them to feed the dog and do their homework and brush their teeth. The sun shone on them and the young mother cried, “Nothing will ever be lovelier than this.” Then the nights came, and the storms, and the path was sometimes dark, and the children shook with fear and cold, and the mother drew them close and covered them with her arms. The children said, “Mother, we are not afraid, for you are near, and no harm can come.” And the morning came, and there was a hill ahead, and the children climbed and grew weary, and the mother was weary. But at all times she said to the children, “A little patience and we are there.”

So the children climbed and as they climbed they learned to weather the storms. And with this, she gave them strength to face the world. Year after year she showed them compassion, understanding, hope, but most of all unconditional love. And when they reached the top they said, “Mother, we could not have done it without you.” The days went on, and the weeks and the months and the years. The mother grew old and she became little and bent. But her children were tall and strong, and walked with courage. And the mother, when she lay down at night, looked up at the stars and said: “This is a better day than the last, for my children have learned so much and are now passing these traits on to their children.”

And when the way became rough for her, they lifted her, and gave her strength, just as she had given them hers. One day they came to a hill, and beyond the hill they could see a shining road and golden gates flung wide. And Mother said, “I have reached the end of my journey. And now I know the end is better than the beginning, for my children can walk with dignity and pride, with their heads held high, and so can their children after them.” And the children said, “You will always walk with us, Mother, even when you have gone through the gates.” And they stood and watched her as she went on alone, and the gates closed after her. And they said, “We cannot see her, but she is with us still.”

This mother’s faith in the mysterious love of God anchored her which was evident by her actions with her family. Her end was better than her beginning and so is ours. But it does take time. Our life, our death, our new life in Christ doesn’t happen overnight. It is a mystery, but one thing of which we can be certain. No human love is perfect. No mother’s love or father’s love is perfect. Only the love of God is complete and allows us access to this Complete, Perfect Love so we may become perfected in God’s love. Our mission is to access the transcendent love of God and share it with our children, husbands, wives, neighbors, and people we don’t know so that they can come to know the Absolutely Perfect Love of God. Now that is the best mystery of all mysteries.

References: *Foundations of the Christian Faith* by Karl Rahner; “Mother’s Love,” <http://www.inspirational-short-stories.com/mothers-love.html#ixzz3ZfgffAhl>