

First Friends Church, a Quaker meeting  
Rev. Dr. Loletta M. Barrett  
May 30, 2021  
Abundant Mystery (Trinity Sunday and Interfaith Dialogue)  
Isaiah 6:9-10, John 3:3-8, Romans 8:14-25

Isaiah 6:9-10

And he said, “Go and say to this people: ‘Keep listening, but do not comprehend; keep looking, but do not understand.’ Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed.”

John 3:3-8

Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Romans 8: 14- 25

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

## Message

Today is Trinity Sunday. Of all the mysteries of faith this one gets the most discussion and the least satisfying resolution. How is God three parts in one? My

question is: “How can we limit God to three parts? And, aren’t there more abundant (and interesting) mysteries to be explored and enjoyed, not solved?”

I was trying to solve an irritating personal mystery – how does a file on my computer get to be “read only” when I am the only person using it? I found articles about mysteries- some I didn’t even know were mysteries! Unsolved mysteries about planet earth<sup>1</sup> and the universe,<sup>2</sup> - things science still doesn’t understand.

Like: where did we get water? It is 70 percent of Earth’s surface, but almost non-existent in the universe. Perhaps asteroids filled with ice or the cloud of gas and dust that formed the solar system brought it. It’s also just there in Genesis.

We know oxygen came from Cyanobacteria releasing it as waste 2.4 billion years ago. Oxygen levels stabilized 540 million years ago, but where did the cyanobacteria come from or why did the level finally stabilize so life could evolve? We got no clue. It probably started the Cambrian Explosion- an enormous growth spurt of complex life appearing on earth with brains and eyes and skeletons- oh my! Did that start because of oxygen and earth’s temperature stabilizing and shallow aquatic environments appearing? It’s still a mystery.

Here’s one really applicable to us-will we ever predict earthquakes? About as well as the worst weather forecast. We know how they happen but not why because we don’t understand plate tectonics or when or how the plates began. And

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rd.com/list/unsolved-mysteries-planet-earth/> Meghan Jones

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rd.com/list/mysteries-about-the-universe/> Lauren Cahn

what little we know about the surface of the earth pales in comparison to what we do not know about its core. The insides are as much a mystery as the outside.

An even stranger mystery is we don't know why our planet is called earth. It is "the only planet in our solar system whose name doesn't come from a Roman or Greek god (yes, including Pluto). The name "Earth" comes from the Old English and German words for "ground," but no one knows for sure when it was coined, or by whom." Remember ancient people believed the universe revolved around us. So I guess "ground" and god's names made sense of the mystery then?

And that leads us to mysteries of the universe. Where did the lovely moon come from? Maybe a collision between earth and a smaller planet? Since the moon's chemical composition is similar to earth it would have had to be just like earth. Or maybe it formed from a chunk of earth. The cheese mystery is ruled out.

My other favorite unsolvable mysteries of the universe are: What came before the Big Bang billions of years ago? One answer is nothing, but nobody can know for sure because nobody was there. So let's just solve that one by saying nothing. Whew! One great unsolvable mystery solved. But don't worry! There is still the mystery of dark matter and energy. Scientists know 5 percent of the universe is made of protons, neutrons and electrons. The other 95 percent is dark matter and dark energy. Dark matter is only 25%, the rest is dark energy. Neither are evil from a horror film currently playing in theaters near you. The only thing

we “know” about dark energy is it has a gravitationally repulsive effect instead of pull, and is responsible for the expansion of the universe. But scientists admit both dark matter and energy are undetectable. So the mystery is how can we know anything about something we know nothing about?

And by the way, even though we “know” the universe is expanding we do not know what shape it is. The leading theory is flat- that’s a shape?! We also don’t know how big it is - though it has a known beginning and perhaps an expected endpoint. As “NASA says ‘All we can truly conclude is that the universe is much larger than the volume we can directly observe.’” To which I say that’s a nice mystery answer. And as for knowing it is expanding? How fast is anyone’s guess because years of Hubble telescope calculations directly conflict with “independent and precise measurements” of the early universe expansion. Which means the universe is an even bigger mystery than we thought. And “Our universe could be just one of an infinite number of universes making up a ‘multiverse.’” That’s not just mystery there is actual science behind it. Which leads to an even bigger mystery: “If you look far enough, you would encounter another version of you—in fact, infinite versions of you.” So do those other versions of me like ice cream? Stay tuned and I will let you know when I meet them.

The last two mysteries are: did life originate on earth? And is there alien life? To make a long story short, life may come from Mars but scientists apparently

can't agree which area of science can provide that answer or if "hard" sciences are even equipped to answer that question. And though it is extremely likely that life exists elsewhere (we may need to alter our definition eg. Star Trek's silicone lifeforms), there is no evidence life exists outside of earth. But then my Dad would say most days there is no evidence of intelligent life on earth either.

But big as those unsolved mysteries are, other sciences like sociology and psychology have their own. Let's circle back to the abundant mysteries in our readings for today. Isaiah experienced a vision of the Lord surrounded by angels with six wings. There's a mystery! But the vision's purpose was to warn the people God would, "Make the mind of this people dull, and stop their ears, and shut their eyes, so that they may not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and comprehend with their minds, and turn and be healed." I don't think this is a mystery of God. It is more likely a satirical statement about the mystery of what the people were doing. It coincides with the mystery of what I see people doing.

The Tulsa Race Massacre was perpetrated one hundred years ago. "[T]he story... was rarely passed down from victims to descendants because of fear of retribution, and ... perhaps ... shame for having endured such abuse... Historical records were mostly destroyed, and ... it was called the Tulsa Race Riot, implying it was somehow a two-sided battle..." They became refugees in their own country. "Tulsa — and the nation — have been slow to acknowledge the brutal reality ...

and the lasting impact it's had... 'There are people whose psyche is still affected generationally; trauma after trauma... continues to build on itself... And none of it gets resolved ... in a system that... has unequal application of law and/or opportunity ... [T]he country needs to be humble and acknowledge what the Tulsa Race Massacre did to African Americans, otherwise, there is no moving forward."<sup>3</sup>

The family of George Floyd visited with President Biden one year after his murder. Police reform bills are stalled. Israelis oppress and attack Palestinians. Acts of antisemitism are on the rise in the US. On this "Memorial Day" our minds our dull, ears stopped, and eyes shut because we fail to look, listen or comprehend. How can we turn and be healed? Have we learned? What are we doing to make sure this never happens again? How can descendants of those who cause violence restore people who were victims and their descendants? What do you see and hear?

Nicodemus asked Jesus, "How can anyone be born after having grown old?" The answer is you must be born again or from Spirit. Either works. I am not talking about a one-time conversion ticket to heaven. The mystery of us literally tearing each other apart is a mystery we must solve, individually and together. It is a reimagining of the mystery of life after death. We must be awakened now and resurrected from walking death. No death, conversion or magic words are necessary. Just be a better Muslim, Jew, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, white person,

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2021/05/24/998683497/a-century-after-the-race-massacre-tulsa-confronts-its-bloody-past>

black person, straight person, able person, man, woman, elder, child... And resurrection after physical death will take care of itself.

The biggest mystery of all is how does God put up with us? We have the answer and it's the most abundant mystery or the most abundant wonder- Love that encompasses all. We can live into that mystery. Paul wrote." I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." That's no mystery. The revealing of the children of God in thoughts, words, and actions of Truth and Love is glorious.