

The God Particle

January 12, 2013

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A year or so ago one of the great headlines in the world of science was the discovery of the Higgs Boson particle. For close to fifty years theoretical physicists had postulated that the universe had at the very essence of its fabric a particle much more fundamental and much more elusive than the common ordinary atom.

In many ways yet that had yet to be discovered, they believed it held the world together. It had been coined the God Particle by Leon Lederman a Nobel winning particle physicist whose book promoted the development of a super conductor and accelerator that would be able to move matter in such a velocity that if such a particle existed it would be revealed. And sure enough it was in July of 2012 – physicists walked forth from their laboratories and announced to the world that they had seen God – or should I say the God particle. This particle that serves as the very substance of the universe. The mass behind the mask.

Now I don't begin to understand these things. I'm just a dumb preacher. My scientific knowledge goes as far as my eighth grade science class where Mrs. Loney tried to explain to us back then about what an atom was. Back then atoms were the big deal. They were the essence of the universe. And I can remember as it were yesterday that diagram that Mrs. Loney had us look at over and over again that described theoretically how that atom worked. And what I remember is a little circle inside of a big circle. Inside the little circle, called the nucleus, I was told were two particles – a proton and a neutron. And then circulating around the proton and neutron was an electron. In

essence an atom was the confluence and dance of these three entities – a proton, neutron and electron. Now for you scientists out there I know that it is not as simple as that and that I am revealing at this point my ignorance, but I already told you I am a dumb preacher. So go with me on this. This atom, this confluence and dance of proton, neutron and electron particles I learned contained – though we couldn't see it - an immense power. There is a great energy in this basic particle. In fact the talk back then and the talk now is about what happens when you split an atom. When you split an atom you access and you unleash some of the great power in the universe. Much of our energy and much of our capacity to destroy each other has to do with how we access and unleash the power and the energy found inside the "invisible to the naked eye" particle of the universe.

It would seem one of the fundamental laws of our universe – the things we can least see are the things that have the greatest power.

Now when it comes to curious and powerful sightings, the Genesis writer tells us a story about Abraham and Sarah being paid a visit by three visitors. Last week we talked about the three visitors – or at least the three gifts of the visitors, the wise men. Today we see the visit of three men to Abraham and Sarah – an old couple in the land of Canaan who have been unable to have children. God has promised that of them he will make a great nation, but now they are up in age, far beyond childbearing years – and it doesn't appear that God is going to come through on his promise. But then there arrive these three persons – and the Genesis writer calls these three persons the Lord. "The Lord appeared to Abraham ... and when Abraham looked up he saw three men." We are not quite sure what to make of this. The Lord visits in the personage of three men. Are they angels? Heavenly visitors? Earthly messengers? An early sign of the trinity? We don't know. But in the confluence of three there is the one voice of God and a prophecy and an energy that is about to be unleashed. Guess what, Abraham and Sarah? Sarah is going to have a baby. The movement of the three into the lives of two is going to produce a new life into an old couple. A new life into an old couple. God is up to something in the visit of the three. Something strange and beautiful and nation building. Never has such a power and an energy been discovered, no physicist had yet ever seen it – but it is

the proximity of these three who speak in the voice of the one Lord that brings about promise and hope for all the people. Something miraculous. Dare we call it a power born out of the foundations of the world? Something out of the very essence of the universe? An unleashing of the God particle? And the only thing that Sarah can do in the face of such power and prophecy is to laugh. It is something out of this world – that has seemed to come into this world. As “into the world” as the womb of an old lady.

Today the universal Church celebrates together the Baptism of the Lord and the lectionary points us to the text we read from Matthew 3. And there in Matthew 3 Jesus appears in the wilderness – Jesus who has been unleashed himself in the womb of a young woman – Jesus makes his way into the waters of the Jordan and meets John. And John knows what is happening. He is being visited by a power from beyond. Approached by the elemental forces of the universe. He stops and he stammers because the only thing you are supposed to do when the cosmic forces approach is that you are to get down on your knees. You are in the face of true power. But of course he has it all wrong – the true power is the power that kneels itself. True power is the power that humbles himself. For righteousness to be fulfilled, Jesus says, I am the one who must get down on his knees. I am the one who must be submerged into the waters. This is the elemental force of the universe – humility on its way to loving and redeeming the world. And so John does his duty and baptizes our Lord. Humbled to be the humbler. And so as to make sure there is no mistake about all this – all of a sudden the one becomes the three. Jesus rises out of the water and he is joined by the two others of the Trinity. The Spirit descends like a dove and the voice of the Father is heard to say, “This is my Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” He has fulfilled the righteousness. He has submitted to the baptism of repentance. He has knelt and humbled himself. And now the confluence of the three are about their mission in the world. The mission of power and promise that will be discovered in the humble love of the Son walking the dusty trails of Palestine. Something is being unleashed here. And it takes but only a moment for the Spirit to drive the Son into the wilderness where the first act of redemption comes through the penitential fast and the face to face with the devil. The

cosmic and loving power of the Trinity is already at work redeeming creation from the grip of the evil one. The unleashing, dare we say, of the divine particle.

And it all ends up with this same Jesus strapped up to a cross and what do they attempt to do? They attempt to split the particle. Split the atom. Pierced his side, nailed his hands and feet – and what they didn't know that they were doing was that they were unleashing a cosmic and elemental force into the universe. It was the force of love. The greatest love. No greater love has a person, than one who would lay down his life. The confluence of Father, Son and Holy Spirit holds within it the power of the universe that makes the greatest nuclear reactor look like a AAA battery. And the power is love. The power is life. The power is new life through love.

This is what happens, you see, when you encounter the divine particle. When you approach the confluence of the proton, neutron, electron – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You tap into an elemental force not to reckon with – because instead it wishes to reckon with you. It wishes to fill you. Overwhelm you. Make you into a new creation. Sons and daughters of God. Vessels of the Holy Spirit. Agents of grace and love.

C.S. Lewis put it this way:

The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-Personal life is to be played out in each one of us; or (putting it the other way round) each one of us has got to enter that pattern, take his place in that dance. There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made. Good things as well as bad, you know, are caught by a kind of infection. If you want to get warm your must stand near the fire: if you want to be wet you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to, or even into, the thing that has them. ... They are a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very centre of reality. If you are close to it, the spray will wet you; if you are not, you will remain dry.

You see this is what we speak of when on Sunday morning we assemble in this place and we say, "I believe in God the Father, Almighty ... I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord ... I believe in the Holy Ghost" – we call it the Apostles' Creed – but what we speak of is trinity. We speak of it virtually every Sunday. We say every Sunday that at the core of the universe, written into the fabric of reality, the fountain spurting up from the very essence of existence is this great three person particle we call the divine. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They hovered over the deep. Spoke creation into existence. And by being broken and split on the cross – unleashed the only real power, the power of divine and eternal love.

And that is what the Church has come into being for – to discover over and over again the divine particle. To tap into the greatest of all the powers. To take on the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because the things we can least see, are what have the greatest power. "No one has ever seen God," the apostle wrote, "but if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us." Righteousness is fulfilled when the love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit comes into our lives on its way into the lives of others. That's how we participate in the divine physics.

So in these weeks to come we are going to draw our life into the life of the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit and seek to understand the love languages of God. How God speaks to his creation through the personhood of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We speak of Trinity every Sunday – but what might that mean if we were to approach and immerse and humble ourselves before the One who has humbled himself before us. What might happen if we drew in the power of the broken, split, crucified particle?

Philip Hallie, in one of the most powerful books I've read, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*, tells the true story of a little village in France, Le Chambon.

In the center of the town was a Reformed Church, a relatively small congregation led by its pastor, Andre Trocme. The time was the early 1940's and the occupation of France by the Nazi's.

Trocme and his congregation were devout students of the scriptures and through their study sought to be drawn into the life of God. They had been discussing in their studies the crisis at hand about what was happening to the Jews. Thousands of Jewish refugees were pouring out of Germany into France illegally and were seeking sanctuary in towns and houses of sympathetic Frenchmen. The French government had declared it illegal to harbor Jews. They talked about this in their Bible study and it was easy to do so because it was just theory. Theoretical physics should we call it. But then came the day in the dead of winter when there was a knock on the door of the home of the pastor. His wife, Magda Trocme, answered it and there stood on her doorstep in the freezing snow was a young woman, a Jewish refugee looking for shelter. Now it was no longer theory. It was a person. A person who needed their life sheltered and saved.

And the pastor's wife in seeing the frightened Jew, opened wide her door and remembering the words she studied in Deuteronomy 19 – "make for yourself a city of refuge, lest innocent blood be shed" she said to the young refugee, "Come in, come in, come in!" And it began. The pastor's house and the houses of many in their congregation became sanctuary to over 3000 Jews on their way to escape Hitler's pursuit.

In concluding the book about these remarkable people who allowed love for their fellow human beings to trump any fear they might have of the consequences – Philip Hallie described it this way – I do it in summary: He said that when it comes to hanging a door there is a certain amount of physics involved. There are physical forces that must be balanced between door frame, hinge and door. The forces of physics must work together and apart in order to allow a door to open and close freely. None of these forces of physics we see.

But then he said there are other forces at work when someone decides to open a door. They are the forces at work when on the other side of the door is someone who needs help, someone who needs love, someone whose life brings risk to you and your family. There is another force at work for someone to decide to open that door or to keep it closed.

Halle doesn't explain what that force is. But we know. We know. The divine particle. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The three person dance of Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. The source of all love. The nucleus of all power. Found in the womb of an old lady and a young girl. Broken and crucified. Unleashed to abide and be perfected in us.