

Holy Trinity Sunday, June 12, 2022

Readings: *Isaiah 6: 1-7, Romans 11:33-36, John 3: 1-17*

The Holy Trinity Reveals Himself to Sinners

When Isaiah beheld the glory of the Lord, he cried out *“Woe is me!”* For the sinner cannot stand in the presence of a holy God and live (Is. 6:1–7). But God the Father lifted up His Son Jesus for us on the cross, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. This eternal life of Christ is given us according to the Holy Spirit’s good pleasure in Baptism. *“Unless one is born [again] of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”* (John 3:5). To sinners in fear of death, the messengers of God place on our lips the living body and blood of Christ and speak His words of absolution, *“Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for”* (Is. 6:7). Having received forgiveness and life from the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit, we join with the angels in praising the blessed Trinity, *“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts!”* (Is. 6:3). *“For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen”* (Rom. 11:33–36).

Sermon Transcript:

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

First thing, first, we have to get over a couple of things about this Athanasian Creed that may be a little challenging to start off with. First off it says, this is the catholic faith. Catholic is just another word for universal. It's an old word. It used to just mean the universal church. So when we say catholic, we mean the church at large, everybody who calls upon the name of the Lord. When we say Roman Catholic, we mean the denomination that is specifically led by the Pope and the bishops and all of that. But that's different than the small c, catholic universal faith. So just get that out of the way. That's what we mean when we say the catholic, the universal faith.

Now secondly at the end of the Athanasian Creed, there comes a comment that seems to be a little bit challenging for us. It's almost the last two things that we say. At his coming, all people will rise again with their bodies and give an account concerning their own deeds. And those who have done good will enter into eternal life and those who have done evil into eternal death, eternal fire.

Now at first look, you might say, "Well, wait a second, here in the Lutheran Church especially, we say, "You are justified by faith, by grace, not through works, less any man should boast." And yet here, it seems to say, "We're going to give an account concerning our own deeds and if we have done good, we will enter eternal life. And if we have done evil, into eternal death." That sounds like we're going to be judged by what we do. But let's frame that with what we know in the Bible about who Jesus Christ is and where we find our hope.

Why did Jesus become a man? He became a man so that He would be like us in body and soul and mind. Jesus Christ, through the incarnation, has a body and a soul and a mind just like you and me. In addition to that, He is also 100% God. Now, logically, that does not make sense. I understand that. You can either be a 100% of one thing or 100% of another thing. You can't be 100% of both things, at least from a human perspective. God, however, as we learn in Romans, "The depth and the riches of wisdom of the knowledge of God, how unsearchable are His judgments and inscrutable His ways." In other words, there are things that God can do that just finally cannot make total and complete sense to us. There are a few things that we just have to accept on faith, because this is what the Word of God says. So Christ is 100% God, 100% man. And He came to earth that He might fulfill the law that we are unable to do. In other words, if Jesus stands before the Father and the Father asks the Son, "What deeds have you done?" He can lay out His entire life and say, "This is what I did and it was perfect."

You and I, on the other hand, if we were to stand before the Father and He says, "What have you done?" And we laid out our lives, not so much, good and faithful servant. However, just because I look at my own life and my own deeds and I say, "I cannot live up to being judged by God and His law," I can still promise you that you and I can stand before the Father on the last day and be judged by Him and have Him judge our deeds, and we still are going to be welcomed into the kingdom because our deeds are replaced by the deeds of Christ. When we stand before the Father, miraculously, the Son jumps in front of us and He says, "Their deeds are not counted against them. They're mine. My deeds, however, are counted for them." So when we stand before God, and we give an account of our own deeds, our deeds are replaced by Christ. Our deeds are only this. I have done nothing except believe that God's Word has done it all for me. And you have already judged Christ for my misdeeds. So there's nothing left for God to look at, in me, except the deeds of Christ done in and through me. Our sinful deeds, our sinful nature was drowned in baptism. In baptism we killed our old deeds, all of our sins, all of the evil that we have done was drowned in the water. And through the Word of God, in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, we were brought forth to new life. And therefore our life now is the life of Christ. And that is all that God sees in us.

So when we stand before the judgment throne and we are judged by our deeds, our deeds are Christ's deeds because of His grace and mercy given to us in our baptisms. You see, we received the presence of the Holy Spirit, that Holy Spirit, which gives us life, which enables us to declare the words to be true. In the same way that Isaiah was touched by the coals on the altar and he was declared clean, not because of anything that he had done, but because he had been given a gift. And what does that coal on the altar stand for? Well, what happened on the altar? Sacrifice happened on the altar. The animals were sacrificed for the covering of sins. And so by the angel taking the coal upon the lips of Isaiah, he is saying, "This sacrifice, which was for your sins is covering you, is cleansing you and therefore you are now declared clean because of the sacrifice."

It's the same for you and me. We are made clean by the sacrifice of Christ, who is the ultimate, the full sacrifice, the sacrifice that Isaiah was pointing to, but has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. So in essence, not only have our lips been touched with the coals of the sacrifice, but our whole bodies have been washed and drowned by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and brought to new life. And therefore we are free because we have the Spirit within us through the power of the Word. The Spirit gives life to spirit. The Spirit has given us life.

So just so we know when we stand before our Creator and we are judged, the verdict is going to be for all who call upon the name of the Lord, the verdict is going to be, not guilty. "Well done, good and faithful servant. Welcome into the kingdom of God." That's what it means to be judged for our deeds. Do we believe that Christ did it for us? That's the only deed that is ours, faith. And even that is a gift given to us by God so we claim no credit whatsoever. So, but what do we believe? We believe that this Christ 100%, God, 100% man, came to die for us that we might be freed from the judgment, that we might be born anew. Here Nicodemus asked, "Can an old man be born again?" Well, yes, actually he can. Not through going through his mother's womb again, but going through the waters of baptism.

The spirit is made alive in baptism. We have God with us. In fact, you think about this when you receive the Lord's supper. I say to you, "This is the body of Christ given for you." And then the elder says, "This is Christ's blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." Those words, for you, are the most powerful words in the entire universe, because God is giving you His life. You are receiving, not just some imaginary body and blood, but you are receiving the fullness of Christ who cannot be separated. So you're receiving both the human and the divine. You are receiving God every Sunday. God shows up and He is with you and He is in you and He empowers you. And therefore, everything that you do is a result of Him and His presence in you and for you. And so that's what we hold fast to because He has promised this to us.

Now, as I said, the Athanasian Creed does a wonderful example of explaining exactly what we believe and what we do not believe. Now, can we philosophically say we understand the Trinity any better than we did beforehand? Eh,

probably not. We worship the Trinity in unity and unity in Trinity. Okay. Again, either your Trinity, either you're three or you're one. You can't be both. And yet in the Scriptures, it says that He is. Jesus Christ is both.

Even last week, when we read about the Tower of Babel and God comes down and He speaks and He says, "Let us go down." And then He says, "Let us confuse the language." Who is the us, that He's talking to? It's the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit having an internal conversation within the Godhead. Now, can I understand that? No. Can I tell you that this is what Scripture says? Yes. Therefore, we stand firm on this fact, that God is both triune and singular. Three persons, one God.

And then I just have to go back to Romans, "How unsearchable are His judgments and inscrutable His ways." There are certain things that I just am never going to fully understand about God and that's okay because what He has given to me to understand is pretty straightforward. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only son. That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." It is really, truly as simple as that.

"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him." That's it. Believe that Christ died for you. It's as simple as that. The rest of this stuff, God's going to reveal it when we get to heaven and it'll finally make sense there. Until that time we trust that God knows what He's doing and that He has done it all for us.

May that for us, be with you always and protect you and keep you in the one true faith, unto life everlasting. Amen.