

Holy Trinity Sunday, June 4, 2023

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.

So today we are trying to at least have a better understanding of the Trinity than we did before we came in. I'm not going to say we're going to understand it or grasp it fully because let's face it, a God that we can truly fully understand is not that good of a God. If you look around at the pantheon of small G gods in this world, the Greek and the Romans, the Hindu and the Buddhist and all the other gods that are in this world, these gods look a lot like us. They lie. They cheat. They steal. They commit adultery. They have revenge on each other. They have sibling rivalries. They do all sorts of things that humanity does. It really looks like most of the gods out there were created in our image. We looked at the way we behave and we just said, well, there's a god for that. There's a god for jealousy. There's a god for love. There's a god for this, that and the other thing. And we create gods in our own image.

But the Scriptures tell us that God created us in His image and this God is a God that we cannot fully comprehend. Now He has revealed Himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That much is clear. He's also said that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. We can read that in Scripture. And so that also is clear. Where it gets a little murky is when we say, well there's a Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. There's three persons, but there's only one God. And that's where we go. I give up. I'm not sure how this works, but we have to do this because the Word of God compels us to preach.

One of the things that we learn is that God's Word does what He says it's going to do. And so when He speaks, what does He speak through? He speaks through His Word, and who is the Word or what is the Word? The Word is the Son of God. So at the very beginning we see the Trinity at work in Genesis 1:1-3. You've got God looking over the world and it was formless and void and God said, "Let there be light." And there was light and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. So you've got God, which we know Father, He's the one that is going to create. You've got the Spirit hovering over the waters. That's pretty clear. So you've got the Father and you've got the Spirit, but where in the world is the Son? God said, "Let there be light." Again, what does God use to speak? He uses not just words, but He uses His Word. And we learned from John 1:1 that in the

beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. So when God speaks, He speaks His Word and His Word is the Son of God and the Son of God is the second person of the Trinity. And so when He says, "Let there be," the Word speaks light into existence where there was nothing.

Now herein again we have a little bit of a struggle that humanity is dealing with because those looking outside the church, and sometimes ourselves, struggle with the idea where did God come from? I mean, we know God created this world and He created the stars and everything in them, but where did God come from? And the Biblical Christian answer is, well God is. I am. God has always existed. He has no beginning and no end. Now does that make reasonable logical sense? No. But that's what we believe because that's what the Word of God speaks and says. I am who I am. Before anything else was created I was. He has always existed. He just always was. Now we can say that that seems illogical and that's different from everything else, but the reality of it is no matter what god you worship or if you worship no god, and you believe in materialism, evolution and the growth from nothing to something, you also, we all, humanity, everything, there is something that has no beginning and no end. If you believe in evolution, the universe started with the big bang and instantaneously matter and energy were in existence. Well, where did that matter and energy come from? If nobody created it, then it just always was. So matter and energy have always existed. Now, other people say, well, this is a cycle. It grows and then it compresses and then it blows up again and the new start happens and then it does the same thing over and over again. Well, that's all fine and good, but where did it start? You see every single faith has a point where we say something existed before anything else existed. With evolution, it's matter and energy that always existed. With us it's a personal God who has a name, who created everything else, who loves us and cares for us and has a purpose for our life. For the other gods, an older god got ripped apart or they were something or they fought with each other and killed one, and that became the earth. All kinds of crazy ideas where some giant turtle is carrying around the world. And that turtle... I mean it's all sorts of crazy ideas, but something had to exist before anything else had to exist and that something that existed is the creator of everything else and is eternal by definition, having no beginning and no end. We just know the name of that.

We know the reality. See, so the Word tells us and we are compelled to believe it because it is His Word and His Word does not speak lies and His Word does what He says it's going to do. So when the Word says, as we read last week, "Let us go down and see what man is doing at the Tower of Babel." Who is God talking to when He says, "Let us go down?" It's an internal conversation between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And when He created us as human beings, what did He say? Let us make man in our image and yet I the Lord your God am one. So we got to wrestle with that. I tell you what, I would be very happy to just say, you know what, the Father started somewhere along the line, He created the Son. After that came the Holy Spirit, and then they decided to create everything else. That'd be easy. It'd be simple logic and I wouldn't have to spend an entire sermon trying to explain it. But I do have to spend an entire sermon trying to explain it because the Word of God insists upon it. And I believe that the Word of God is the authority and has the power, and therefore I have to wrestle with this and so do we.

So this is what we have come to understand, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity. So there are three persons distinct, but they are the same essence and they are all one God. Now I have tried multiple ways and humanity has tried multiple ways to try and explain this in any way that makes sense. You know that some people have used the image of an egg that has a shell and a yolk, and the white and all three of them are different, but they're the same egg or an apple has a peel and the center, and the core and then flesh, but

they're all apple. Nice try. Doesn't work. Because the peel is definitely different than the core, we can tell. And the shell is definitely different than the yolk, we can tell. So it doesn't quite add up.

So mathematically I've come up I think with the only way of explaining the Trinity that makes any amount of sense whatsoever. One times one times one equals one, the Father times the Son times the Holy Spirit equals one God. Best I could do. But this is what we have. Trinity and Unity. Unity and Trinity. Neither confusing the persons. So the Father is unique, does unique things. The Son is unique and does unique things and the Holy Spirit is unique and does unique things. But they're not three different Gods, they're only one God. So we neither confuse the persons, nor do we divide the substance. We don't confuse the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and get them all mixed up. That was most recently illustrated again probably 10, 15 years ago by a book called *The Shack*. And *The Shack* confused the persons and what they did. That was a completely messed up understanding of God. So that that's probably the most recent example of that.

Nor dividing the substance. And that's what our Muslim friends do, saying God is God and Jesus is not. And so separating them out. So these things are still in existence and we need to declare what the Word of God declares. So we have this God who has spoken to us through His Son and the whole of the Trinity work together for our salvation. We have a God who is close to us. When we talk about the Trinity and unity and substance and all this stuff, it seems really esoteric and out there somewhere. But the nature of God is complex. But He took that complexity and He said, I am going to come and dwell with My creation. And so Jesus Christ comes as God and man to us for our salvation. I mean, what did Jesus say about our salvation that just like the serpent in the wilderness was lifted up so also will the Son of man. He's preparing us to understand that God died for us in the person of Jesus Christ. And He applies that He died to forgive our sins, but the Father was involved in our salvation because the Father declared God, Jesus' death is going to be sufficient for My wrath and the payment for sin. So the Father declared this to be the way to go. The Son accomplished the salvation. And then Jesus, after He died, on the third day He rose again by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit worked to complete everything and make sure it all worked out well.

So they all work together. But it's not a duplicity, it's one God. Again, I'm not going to be able to explain it. I'm just describing it to you and that God is active then as we said, God's Word does what he says it's going to do. Not only did He create light out of nothing, and when he said, "There's fish in the sea," there are fish. And He says, "There are birds in the air," there're birds in the air. And when He said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and you are my child," that happens because God's Word does what He says it's going to do. And His Word is active in the Trinity. The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit come to us. And so we live in this presence of the Holy Spirit.

Even in our liturgy, we struggle with the identity and the multiplicity and singularity of God. You've got in our hymn of praise, "The Gloria in Excelsis". "You alone are the Lord. You alone are the most high Jesus Christ with Holy Spirit and the Father." If you're alone, you're one, but you're also with the Father. And we struggle with this. We try and explain it, but the best we can do is the Trinity, three in one. And all of this is for our salvation. All of this is to bring us about to the understanding that God works for us. That God, even though He is beyond our comprehension, He chooses to give us an understanding that is sufficient for our salvation. He chooses to send His Holy Spirit to us, to enliven us, to enlighten us, to gather us, to call us, and to bring us into the one true faith. Now, as we're talking about this creed, there's one line that usually gives people pause and they struggle with this. It's at the very end of the creed. It's the last thing that I said in our insert. And those who have done good will enter into eternal life and those who have done evil into eternal fire. Now, if you

read that by itself, it sounds like you're going to be judged by what you do. So you're saved by your works. I better do good because that's what's going to get me into heaven. But if that's the case, I don't think I'm getting into heaven and I don't think any of the rest of us are, because our good works don't just need to outweigh our bad works. And we're lucky if that's true. Our good works have to be perfect and none of us get up to that level.

So what does this mean? I thought the Lutheran church said we were saved by grace through faith. That's what Romans says. That's what Ephesians says. That's what is clear. We are saved by grace through faith and not by works. So what are we talking about here? Well, this is we enter the judgment seat of God. On the last day we will stand before God and He will judge us. But it's not going to be something scary because He's going to say, "What good have you done to enter the kingdom of God?" And we're going to look at Him and say, "Well, you said Jesus died for me and that's what counts." So am I looking to myself? No. The good that I do is point to Jesus. Your Word said that that was sufficient for me. And God says, "Well done. Good and faithful servant, not guilty. Enter the kingdom of heaven." That's it. That's going to be our judgment before God, just reminding God that He said, I'm going to be saved because of Jesus Christ. Your Word said it. I believe it therefore I'm good.

We don't need to worry about standing before God. We don't need to worry about our salvation because God has saved us through His Son. And all we got to do is believe that God's Word does what He says it's going to do. Now, what does that mean for our day-to-day life? How do we live in this world? How do we apply this in our lives? I mean, let's face it, the world is pretty chaotic right now. There are problems and trials and tribulations and confusion, wars and rumors of wars. It seems like we're going nuts. Good is being called evil. Evil is being called good. We're celebrating sin, and we're castigating righteousness. And what are we called to do? We're called to believe that God's Word does what He says it's going to do. So God has said, I am with you always to the very end of the age. That's the Word that He has spoken. And if He's spoken it, it's true. He's with us. God has also said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world." That is true. God has already overcome. He's also said, "My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give but My peace, a peace which surpasses all understanding." He's also said that to live is Christ and to die is gain. He's also said that He has sent His Holy Spirit, the helper and the comforter in our lives.

So if all of these words are true, then we do not need to be afraid or act in fear when the world seemed to be falling apart because God is with us and we have His peace and His love and His joy. And therefore, we are called to stand firm in the joy of our salvation, celebrating His work through us and in us, and not let the things of this world weigh us down and cause us to fret and to worry, but that we might be ready in season and out to give witness to the hope that we have in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

We're called to do what we've always done, brag on our God. I'm a sinner like you, but my God, Father has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to forgive my sins and through the power of the Spirit given to me in baptism, I am saved. I'm not guilty and the same is true for everyone out there. Nothing has changed. God's Word remains forever. The Word of the Lord endures forever, and I might add, for you. He has given Himself for you. Trust in Him. Rely on His salvation. Rely on His Word because He will never leave you and He will never forsake you. And that is something you can count on every single day.

May His grace and His mercy and His peace be and abide with you always. now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen.