

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Today is the first Sunday after the Day of Pentecost. This is the day within our liturgical church calendar we honor and celebrate the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Some may argue that our three-year lectionary along with the cycle of our church year restricts us. However, it is set this way in order that it connect us to the root of the historical church, the church of the Apostles of Jesus Christ. And as a confessional church we recognize and confess our faith using the words of three creeds, the Athanasian, the Nicene, and the Apostles' Creeds. From the Athanasian Creed we confess:

“Now this is the catholic faith, (catholic, again, meaning general or universal): we worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God without confusing the persons or dividing the divine substance” (article 384, Athanasian Creed).<sup>1</sup>

And while the term “Holy Trinity” is not mentioned at all in Holy Scripture, the *concept* of the Holy Trinity...the “divine substance” as the creed refers to, *is* mentioned in the Bible. This trinitarian concept has been theologically debated and written about for hundreds of years because it can never be completely understood or rationalized. However, when we look at the work, the knowledge, and the debate of theologians, scholars, and teachers we come to find that the Holy Trinity is our attempt to understand what we are not able to fully understand...it has become, and is, our way to describe God in our own human language. On the other hand, this concept is clearly taught in Scripture as we hear today in our Gospel lesson, and within our second appointed reading, and from the very opening line of this sermon which is taken from St. Paul’s salutations that he uses throughout his epistles...Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, (1 Cor 1:3). But to understand our faith or any part of Holy Scripture, we believe as Lutheran’s that we are *not* able to do this on our own, but our belief in this trinitarian understanding is through the work of the Holy Spirit...as we have been taught according to the Third Article of the Apostles’ Ceed in the Small Catechism. Therefore, it is appropriate that this mystery is celebrated on the first Sunday after Pentecost, when the outpouring of the Holy Spirit first occurred.

While the term “Holy Trinity” is not found in the Bible, the teaching is so vital to the church that it has a day devoted and set aside for teaching about the content of the Holy Trinity. So, our appointed readings for today begin with the teaching of God the Father as the creator. We confess this by saying that we believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. God is the creator and Father of all, just as the creation story from Genesis tells us today. The psalmist then reminds us of how God’s name is to be praised above all names today in our appointed psalm:

- <sup>1</sup> O LORD our Lord,  
how exalted is your name in all the world!
- <sup>2</sup> Out of the mouths of infants and children  
your majesty is praised above the heavens.
- <sup>3</sup> You have set up a stronghold against your adversaries,  
to quell the enemy and the avenger.
- <sup>4</sup> When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,

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<sup>1</sup> The Athanasian Creed is confessed on Holy Trinity Sunday, and found on page 54 in the Lutheran Book of Worship, the LBW, but since the LBW was replaced with the ELW, Evangelical Lutheran Worship hymnal, the Athanasian Creed was removed from the ELW. Therefore, it is not used any longer in our current worship services.

the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,  
<sup>5</sup> what is man that you should be mindful of him...  
and seek him out? (Psalm 8:1-5)

Oddly enough, the only part of the Holy Trinity that we can really get our heads around is the Son, God's *only* Son, Jesus Christ. But even more ironic, is that, this day, this Holy Trinity Sunday is the only day of the church year that is not devoted to an event in the life of Jesus or the church. So, what are we to take away from the lessons today? And if the day is not about Jesus, what is it about...I mean, what is the Good News for us within the Holy Trinity?

In our Gospel lesson today, we hear the risen Christ bids farewell to his disciples. This, I believe is the essence of the Holy Trinity in that, it is not the end, things DO NOT stop with this farewell from Jesus, they continue. This is where the Holy Trinity comes in. The Trinity is about *movement*. The trinity is about life and not the end of something as we listen to the risen Christ bid farewell. When we think of God, think of God as the creator...we are taken to the time of nothing and we are taken to a time when God starts things in motion, where things start moving. God is the unmoved mover who starts things moving. Listen again to the opening of our lessons from Genesis and listen for movement. Listen how things begin to move by the, רוח *ruach*, the wind, the breath, or the spirit, which is all the same Hebrew word that God sets in motion:

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup> the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup> Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. <sup>4</sup> And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Gen 1:1-5)

The breath from God sweeps over the waters, here is the essence of life because fundamentally, life is movement. Movement is life, from microscopic cellular activity to our daily mondan routines and habits, motion is the common denominator for life or being alive. Movement sustains our health, it drives our mental clarity, and it reflects a universal rhythm. Movement is the very definition of existence...and movement requires constant change and progression because if there is not movement, there is death. And so, as Jesus, who historically is a moment in time, bids farewell to the disciples in our Gospel lesson today, the Holy Spirit moves that life and continues that life throughout the ages. In other words, the Holy Spirit kept Jesus moving yesterday, will keep Him moving today in our lives as we experience this movement here today in this gathering to worship...we experience him here in this Holy Word and in this Holy Meal, the Holy Spirit will keep Jesus moving now and through the ages long past us all.

We often say or hear that God was, is, and will be. From the very start, God moved things and created and continues to move in so many ways around us. In time we see the Lord God who is, Jesus Christ, and in the ages to come the Holy Spirit will open the hearts and the minds of those to come into those ages to come. Listen again to what Jesus is bidding us today, his disciples. Listen as if Jesus were right here saying this to us:

<sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and

of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt 28:17-20)

As we gather in the very presence of Jesus Christ to worship, YES, there are some that doubt, some that question and wonder. Nonetheless, Jesus does NOT instruct us to Circle the wagons and fortress ourselves safely within these walls and raise an army of perfectly righteous people to fight against the darkness of the world out there. Jesus is commissioning us to GO!...be light out there amidst the darkness, to go and obey everything that he has commanded us. We are commissioned to GO and unleash mercy, grace, and love in the world. This is the authority we are given from Jesus.

But look around who he is sending, who he is commissioning...it's you, it's them, it's me and we are far from perfect just like those who heard this commission from the very mouth of Jesus. They too were far from perfect and Matthew reminds us the reader of this when he says they worshiped him but some doubted. Doubt is not something that disqualifies us, it is something that moves us...it sends us seeking to understand. No matter the doubt, they were sent to be the authority of Jesus Christ, in other words, theirs and our authority is to seek understanding, to be mercy, grace, and love, for God and for our neighbor.

Unfortunately, we look at the world out there, more specifically, our culture and retreat in fear, and segregate and isolate ourselves and sit quietly and very still, safely content in our fortress the church. Looking then at the culture, we respect and even revere our so called self-made-individuality and we isolate ourselves in it. And in response we too as a church, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, isolate ourselves in our understanding of our self-righteous faith in here. And we shout out at the world from the fortress we have built in here and call it the church. And as a result, we then set our sights on growing the Gospel or spreading the Gospel by winning souls through gimmicks that we hope will park butts in our pews, and make those out there just like us in here. However, do we really measure the power and the growth of the Gospel simply by growing the numbers in the church? If so then we are merely using statistics to judge the vitality of our church and in turn if the numbers are good, our faith is good and we are satisfied and at rest. Or we can say we are dead.

The prophet Hosea has prophesized this:

<sup>6</sup>For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,  
the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings. (Hosea 6:6)

How then do we make known the steadfast love or the knowledge of God for others beside ourselves? Can you just imagine for a moment Jesus telling the churches of our time no matter if they are thriving or struggling, "I desire mercy over preserving your reputation." What would we say if Jesus were to tell us, "I desire mercy, not ambition." Could we imagine Jesus saying to any congregations who are floundering, "I desire mercy, not strategy sessions and rebranding efforts." As we go from here can we keep in mind what Jesus might be saying to us..."I desire mercy, not power."<sup>2</sup> Today we don't have to imagine, Jesus is *GOD'S love made manifest and that love is*

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<sup>2</sup> Skinner, Matthew L., *Matthew, The Gospel of Promised Blessings*. Nashville: Abington Press, 2024, page 70. The Rev. Dr. Skinner's commentary on the Great Commission from the Gospel of Matthew undergirds this sermon, but I could not resist his imagining Jesus telling us today about His desire for mercy over our desires that we assume to "grow the church."

*telling us, “Go therefore and make disciples” not by power and might, but through mercy, grace, and love toward our neighbors.*

On this day, in the language we use to attempt to understand God, we celebrate the Holy Trinity, we give thanks that God has created all we know to this point. Through the Holy Spirit, God is with us NOW in the presence of Jesus Christ speaking to us through this Holy Word, and feeding us in this Holy Meal...it is God reaching out to us with His mercy and grace, reminding us that through that manifest love we are set free from the bonds of sin and death.

In this Triune God...God the Father our Creator, God the Son our Redeemer, and God the Holy Spirit our Sanctifier...is the self-evident revelation of the profound depths of God's heart and the profound depths of God's pure love for us all...that remains for us by moving through us and with us all...to the end of the age. And so now may we go and be that same mercy for others so that they too may live in that same peace that through the work of the Holy Spirit is with us all to the end of the age.

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*