

Holy Trinity: June 16, 2019
“The Greatness of the Trinity”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

What important thing is happening today? What do we celebrate? Trinity Sunday. It is the culmination of the Festival Season of the Church Year. From Advent to today, we hear and receive from God’s Word the sacred mysteries of God Himself – specifically who Jesus is, and His work done for you. Today is a time to ponder the entire Trinity—the reality and position of the Godhead and you, His creation. What could we possibly say to begin such high thoughts and praise? Nothing better than His words given to us, for us, **“Romans 11:33-36.”**

These words echo the questions raised by Zophar the Naamathite, one of Job’s friends, ***“Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.”***¹

In answer to these questions, several proposals have been made. There are those who say there is no God; these are called atheists. For these, the questions are nonsense, because who cares about finding out knowledge of something that doesn’t exist anyway. More dangerous to the sinful nature of a Christian is agnosticism. Agnostics do not deny the existence of God. They believe there is a God; however, they believe that we cannot know Him. This usually ends up with sinful man turning to creation to find God. It is here we hear things such as, “You know God by looking at nature. God is found in every blade of grass, or the eyes of animals, or looking deep within yourself, or even known by how you see/act with others.” For the Agnostic the confession can be summarized in this way, “There may be a God, even a personal God in the Christian sense; but, we cannot know Him. If we worship at all, it can really only be like the ancient Athenians, where an altar was erected to an unknown god.”

¹ Job 11:7–9

The Agnostic view is a dangerous heresy that pulls at many Christians. It is often posited as modern and enlightened. The concept of God is too large, too vast, too impossible to grasp, so maybe we should boil God down. It is an attempt to boiler-plate God. Just like a king-sized candy bar is too large to eat in one sitting without getting sick, so we attempt to make God smaller and smaller until all that is left is bite-sized Trinity.

Trinity Sunday brings us out of our miniaturizing of God-attempts, and recalls the larger reality—God is not just a king-sized candy bar; He is even greater than the factory that Charlie and Grandpa Joe could fathom. The First Commandment requires fear of God, proper fear of God. The explanation in the Catechism to the First Commandment is, “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” Each subsequent explanation begins: “We should fear and love God so that we. . .”

I have said it before, the fear of God in the Old Testament is always associated with the proper worship of God. It is why wise Solomon writes, “***The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.***”² Fear of God is extremely important; it is no small reason why it is listed first. When people no longer fear God, they are capable of every kind of atrocity imaginable. God makes it abundantly clear just who man is when there is no fear of God, “***None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.***” “***Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.***” “***The venom of asps is under their lips.***” “***Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.***” “***Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.***” “***There is no fear of God before their eyes.***”³ When the fear of God is diminished or replaced, the standard of right and wrong becomes whatever the sinful flesh and selfish will can dream up. Simply put, where there is no fear of God all hell breaks loose.

True fear of God relies on mercy. It trusts in mercy. It lives from mercy. The text from Romans 11 this morning forms the conclusion of St. Paul’s masterful treatment of the doctrine of grace, also known as the doctrine of election. To elect is to choose. Grace is God’s choice. God chooses to be merciful and everything depends on that gracious choice. If you have God’s mercy, you are rescued from every danger to body and soul, possessions and reputation. If you do not have God’s mercy, you are under His judgment;

² Proverbs 9:10

³ Romans 3:10-18

you are a lost and condemned creature, without any merit or worthiness. Everything depends on the grace of God.

I know to whom I am speaking. The sinful flesh still clings to each of you, myself included. To hear it all depends on God's grace goes against the grain, "We are American's, where at least I know I'm free. Who are you to talk to me like that?" Our sinful nature would rather be God's boss. I would rather sit in the judgment-seat and tell God the way things should be. It is much more seemingly attractive to my flesh to give God instructions on how to be God. Sadly, we see this in many denominations changing God's Word, removing portions of it, changing pronouns, anything they can dream to twist the Bible to back up their sinful desires.

But these things should make us first look to ourselves. Most of us will piously assert that we want instruction, but as soon as the divine instruction challenges us at our very core, we resist and start telling God what's what. It is easier to turn our backs and close our eyes to God's Word, while speaking what we think we remember what the truth is, or at least what makes me feel better.

Our Gospel lesson is a good example of this. Nicodemus knew that Jesus was a faithful teacher. He didn't yet understand that Jesus was the eternal Son of God. He was ready to be taught, but not openly where his colleagues could see him. He went to Jesus at night in search of wisdom. Jesus told him he had to undergo a new birth. He had to be born again, from above, by the power of the Holy Spirit or he would never see the kingdom of God.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, when we meet God it must be on His terms. We don't make our own rules and require God to follow them. We don't negotiate with God as to how He and we will relate. Our prayers don't convince God. He doesn't fear us. He doesn't bend to our will. God decides. He's God. He judges unbelievers and He is gracious to penitent sinners. He owes you no explanation for what He does and how He does it. God doesn't need to justify Himself to you. You need God to justify you by grace alone through faith alone. Anyone who doesn't know that cannot know God.

"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!"⁴ God knows better than you and me. He is smarter than you, and His judgments are fair, always.

⁴ Romans 11:33

It is true God has given us reason and logic. Using the reason and strength that God has given to us, there is much we can do. We can figure out how to raise better crops, make a better cars, build better boats, bring about greater employment, and improve technology. The human race has made astoundingly remarkable advances in technology in the past century. For all of the marvels and advances we have made, there is one we have never figured out: the mind of God.

“‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?’ ‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’”⁵ God is not a machine that you figure out. He’s not a tool you use. He’s not a problem you solve. He’s not your student to teach. As Isaiah writes, ***“Who has measured the Spirit of the Lord, or what man shows him his counsel? Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?”***⁶

Nobody. Nobody directs God. Nobody counsels God or instructs God. It is God who directs, counsels, instructs, teaches, and shows. Really, God owes nothing to anyone. He said to Job, ***“Who then is he who can stand before me? Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.”***⁷

Turn on the T.V. or the radio. Pick up a newspaper. Scroll through Facebook or Twitter. Listen to conversations that people have. Listen to your heart and mind; still, sinful humanity presumes to put God on trial. The hungry children, the fight over abortion and adoptions, wars, disease, flooding, draught, blatant injustice, and ongoing suffering, these are all raised up to God as solemn charges of neglect, as if He is responsible for the evils produced by those who hate him.

Today is Trinity Sunday. Who cares about the Holy Trinity? Who cares that God is triune? Who cares that God is one in essence and three in persons? Christians care. Christians who fear, love, and trust in God care. Christians who have been born again by the washing of Holy Baptism care. Christians who have seen the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit where Jesus was lifted up on the cross care. But nobody else cares. They don’t want to know whether God is triune. How will that feed their bellies, fill their bank accounts, provide them with a decent job, or fix their personal problems? So the Holy

⁵ Romans 8:34-35

⁶ Isaiah 40, 13-14

⁷ Job 41:10-11

Trinity is tossed aside in favor of God as the heavenly aspirin tablet.

But you know better. God has opened your heart and ears through His Word. You won't put God on trial because you know that the source of all misery, injustice, pain, and sorrow in this world is your own sin, and that sin lies deep inside of your corrupted hearts. It is your doing; not God's. It is your fault; not God's. You are to blame for whatever it is that ails us and the world around us, and we know better than to question God's ways and judgments and paths – you know instead to throw yourselves before Him as guilty sinners pleading to God for mercy. You fall at His feet, “Most merciful God, I am by nature sinful and unclean. I have sinned against you in thought word and deed.”

You should expect to hear Him say, “You get nothing. Good day, sir.” But, Oh, how merciful and gracious He is, ***“For from him and through him and to him are all things.”*** Everything good is of Him, from the Father of all lights, the source of all goodness, mercy, love, and truth. He, who in eternity is of Him, is none other than Jesus Christ our God and Lord.

“But it is also necessary for everlasting salvation that one faithfully believe the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is the right faith that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the same time both God and man. He is God, begotten from the substance of the Father before all ages; and He is man, born from the substance of His mother in this age: perfect God and perfect man, composed of a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the Father with respect to His divinity, less than the Father with respect to His humanity. Although He is God and man, He is not two, but one Christ: one, however, not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh, but by the assumption of the humanity into God; one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.”⁸

Though He knew no sin, He became sin for us. He became man and dwelt among us. He spoke of God's judgments. He revealed God's ways. He taught God's mind. What the world couldn't find by its own ingenuity, hard work, and cleverness, the Word Made Flesh revealed, ***“No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”⁹***

Look where the Son of Man is lifted up. Look where the Father's eternal Son who has

⁸ Athanasian Creed

⁹ John 3:13-15

become our brother is nailed to the cross. Israel rebelled and put God on trial. They stood in judgment of their Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. God sent poisonous snakes to punish them. They were dying in the desert of the poisonous venom. They confessed their sins and begged Moses to intercede. He did. God told him to put a bronze serpent on a pole and lift it up for Israel to see. Everyone who looked at the serpent on the pole would live. The poison would not kill them.

This was a sign for us. God says that everyone who believes in Jesus lifted up on the cross will not perish but have eternal life. Don't try to figure out how God can be and do what He is and does. Instead, look to Jesus on the cross. See Him suffering the punishment for your sins, paying the debt that you owed to God, and by His holy death taking away all of your sins.

Look to the cross and live. There is your God. There is the Father, of whom all that is good in this world comes. There is the Son, through whose obedience and suffering we are forgiven of all our sins and made fit for heaven. There is the Holy Spirit, to whom all credit for our faith must be given, for without His gracious power we would remain dead and blind and helpless in our sins. There, as Jesus is lifted up for us all, is the revelation of the true and only God. *“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”*¹⁰

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of the Church
The Holy Trinity

¹⁰ Romans 11:36

16 June 2019

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Brief silence

For an increase in devotion for all the saints, for the faithful proclamation of the Gospel by all pastors in Christ, for an end to schism and division within the Church Militant, and for the proper fear and fervent praise of the Holy Trinity among all those born again from above in Holy Baptism, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For faithful catechesis and formation in the faith for our catechumens, both young and old; for a renewed vigor to study God's Word within the congregations of our Synod; for Christ to be fully formed within us; for courage to walk as children of the light; and for strength in the face of temptation, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the sojourner and stranger, for the persecuted and oppressed, for prisoners and their families, for the enemies of the faith, and for the true repentance of all, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For thankful hearts, and for the faithful support of the Church and the work of the Lord here and throughout the world, for safe travel and heavenly wisdom to be given to those involved with the LWML national convention this week in Mobile, Alabama, especially Pam, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the vocation of fatherhood, that fathers would love and provide for their children, and that children would respect and honor their fathers, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the nations and those who lead them, for an end to violence and war, and for peace throughout the world, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who endure mental illness, for those who mourn, for the lonely and brokenhearted, for those with chronic pain, for the sick and injured, for the hospitalized and shut-in, and for all who have requested our prayers, *[including Dennis, Amber, Larry, Greg, and those we name in our hearts,]* let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For reverent awe as our lips receive the very body and blood of Christ from the holy altar, for the removal of our guilt and deliverance from evil, for the strengthening of our love for God and for one another, and for an increase of faith, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

All glory, honor and praise be to the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Holy, holy, holy is He whose name is majestic in all the earth, through whom we have forgiveness, life and salvation. For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. **Amen.**