

“The Holy Trinity and the Deeds of the Son”

John 3:1-17

Sermon for Holy Trinity Sunday 2022; June 12, 2022

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

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Today is Holy Trinity Sunday. It is the one day in particular that we focus on and give praise to God for who God is. God we say is three in one and one in three: Tri-une, or Trinity.

We talk about God this way based on how God is shown to us in the Holy Scriptures, the written word of God. We do not talk about God this way as if doing so has been generated out of the mind or heart of any human being, no matter how smart they might be. Believing, confessing, and glorying in God as Trinity is not something that the human mind or heart could come up with. It is not something the human mind and heart has come up with. It is displayed for us by God in the words and deeds of God’s Son here on earth, testified to in the Scriptures. Knowing, believing, confessing, and praising God as Trinity is not a matter of our ascending “into heaven” to find God “there” in His own majesty and glory and somehow being able to “see” God as He is. No. Jesus says that “no one has ascended into heaven” (John 3:13). The Apostle Paul says, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?” (Romans 11:33-34 NASB).

If we are to believe and know who God is, God must disclose Himself to us here, on earth. The only way we know who God is and His mind toward us and His will is in and through the “one who has descended from heaven, the Son of Man” as Jesus said to Nikodemus (John 3:13). So Jesus said in prayer to the Father, “I have revealed Your name to the men whom You have given to Me” (John 17:6).

So the disclosure of God comes about through the words and deeds of God’s Son here on earth. These words and deeds actually include the earth itself, for “all things were made through Him,” through the Son (John 1:3). And these words and deeds involve God’s mighty deeds of judgment and deliverance that God the Son worked here on earth among human beings and in the realm of nature. The Holy Spirit is inseparably involved here because He glorifies the Son incarnate and takes what belongs to Him and delivers it to us, as Jesus said (John 16:14). The Holy Spirit caused the mighty deeds of the Son to be written for our instruction; and the Holy Spirit empowers and causes to happen the teaching of Scripture in this world, in this present age, until this age comes to an end in the Father’s will.

Let’s digress here for a moment. People marvel that believers in Jesus Christ and, therefore, believers in the Holy Trinity continue to exist in the world; that the Christian church, that is, the gathering of such believers, continues to exist, even in the face of persecution and hostility, and the weakness of the flesh of Christians. But we confess and believe that the Christian church will always exist on this earth, among human beings, until this age comes to an end in the Father’s will.

But why is this? It is because God is God of this world, as well as all things: “from Him and through Him and to Him are all things,” declares the Apostle (Romans 11:36). It is also because the fact that there are Christians depends on the Holy Spirit. As long as the Holy Spirit exists the Christian church will continue to exist. The gates of hell unleashed among men cannot prevail against her because her faith and her life is given in word and sacrament and in the heart, and mind, and conviction by the Holy Spirit Himself. The Holy Spirit is God.

So there will be people gathered around word and Sacrament in Jesus' name until this world comes to an end. And they will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. They will believe that God raised Him from the dead. They will hold fast the confession that God has made all things. They will find their hope in the forgiveness of sins accomplished by the shed blood of the Lamb, God's own Son. They will be justified by God in Jesus' resurrection from the dead and in the proclamation and deliverance of forgiveness. This will happen because God the Son has done it and the Holy Spirit brings it to us for faith and hope.

Coming back to believing and confessing the Holy Trinity: the wonderful thing is that the disclosure of God in the mighty deeds of the Son on earth show us the Holy Trinity: three persons in one God; one God in three persons. This starts with the confession of one God. This is taught to us in the Ten Commandments and in the instruction God gave to the people of Israel. First of all there is the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods" (Exodus 20:3). This can only mean that there is only one God. Then God the Son instructed Moses to teach the people to believe and confess: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). The first commandment teaches us that only one true God exists. God's further instruction through Moses explicitly sets forth the implication of this: God is one.

But then the deeds of God's Son on earth show us something more. They show us that God exists in three distinct persons, each of which is a person distinct from the others, yet each completely and fully God. The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; yet, there are not three Gods, but one God, as we confess in the Athanasian Creed.

This disclosure of God is shown to us by Jesus, in His deeds and His words. This happens at first because the deeds and words show us that Jesus is true God, as He is truly human. He has descended from heaven to become the Son of Man. He took on our own flesh and blood in the womb of His mother, Mary. He showed Himself true God in what He did. He testified to Himself as God's divine Son by what He said. His deeds were the testimony given to support His words.

But this was not just the deeds of His governance over nature and His power over the devil and His ability to heal and restore broken human flesh. His deeds included being lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness (John 3:14). "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness," Jesus says to us, "so the Son of Man must be lifted up" (John 3:14). Jesus was referring to being lifted up on a Roman cross where He would die so we could escape the death brought by the ancient serpent. This deed gave testimony to what He proclaimed: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

God's love in the giving of His Son meant a profound sacrifice. This sacrifice was given when Jesus was lifted up. When Jesus was lifted up He confirmed the truth of His testimony of who He is as God the Son. In Jesus' own words He said, "Father, the hour has come. . . . I have glorified You on earth having completed the work which You have given me to do" (John 17:4). Jesus went on to say: "Now Father, glorify Me with Your own glory which I had with You before the world existed" (John 17:5). The Son brought glory to the Father when He let them nail Him to a cross, because this was the Father's will to accomplish our redemption. In this being lifted up on the cross He disclosed that He is the Son of the Father (Mark 15:39).

And so the Father glorified the Son by raising Him from the dead on the third day. The Father further glorified the Son by providing that He should ascend to God's right hand to assume the glory the Son had with the Father from all eternity, before all worlds.

The Holy Spirit was then sent by the Father through the Son to glorify the Son and His

redeeming and reconciling death and resurrection. The Spirit glorifies the Son by delivering to us all that the Son possesses and has won for us. The Spirit does this in speech, in the washing of water with the word, in the Son's body and blood in the bread and wine, as the Son says (Matthew 26:26-29). The Spirit does this in His work in our heart and mind of owning up to sin; of believing in the forgiveness won and delivered to us in Jesus' name; and of renewing heart and mind to live for God and for our neighbor. These are all things that belong to Jesus and are delivered to us as the Holy Spirit glorifies the Son.

We see here the persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We see the persons in what Jesus tells us they do. The Father loves the world, so He sends the Son. He also sends the Holy Spirit in and through the Son. The Son glorifies the Father. The Father glorifies the Son by raising Him from the dead and by sending the Holy Spirit to testify to the Son. The Holy Spirit glorifies the Son by testifying to Him and delivering to us what belongs to the Son. Each one does something in relation to the other. This shows us the distinctiveness of their persons. Here is the disclosure of the Holy Trinity.

In this disclosure of the Holy Trinity, God shows us the true character of personhood. None of the persons of God, Father, Son, or Spirit are glorifying themselves. They glorify each other. The Son glorifies the Father. The Father glorifies the Son. The Spirit glorifies the Son and so also then glorifies the Father who sent Him. And most profound and remarkable of all, they glorify each other in order to glorify you and me, by grace out of love.

In the Son, the road of redemption is paved for us who are otherwise fallen away from God in glorification of self. Glorification of self is the operating principle of our corrupted human flesh; it is the operating principle that makes human beings "world." This is the opposite of God and God judges it. Thus, how truly wonderful and remarkable it is that God loved the world so that He gave His only-begotten Son.

Indeed, God so loved us—so loved the world—that He gave His Son. The world which was made through the Son took the Son and nailed Him to the cross. They did this without knowing that God was accomplishing the sacrifice that would win their redemption through their evil deed. But God turned around and raised Him and sent the Spirit to proclaim repentance and forgiveness by grace in His death and resurrection, so that they could believe in Him and have eternal life; life in God, in the Spirit, in the Trinity.

God won redemption for the world through the world's evil deed in rejecting and killing His Son. Through that evil deed He accomplished the redemption human beings need. Here we must say with the Apostle: "Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways" (Romans 11:33). This redemption is obtained by us in rejecting the glorification of self and in turning to the Son, Jesus, in faith in the forgiveness He won.

With respect to God being Holy Trinity, the point today is that in Jesus accomplishing our redemption, God reveals the Trinity. He also reveals the pattern and glory of true personhood: turning away from the glorification of self and finding the way of glorifying the other. It's no wonder the natural human heart and mind and the world dislikes the Holy Trinity so much.

This turning away from glorification of the self is hard in the world which has the operating principle of glorification of self; it is hard because we still live in the flesh that is born of flesh (John 3:6), which also has this as the basic operating principle. But Jesus God's Son and our brother has lived a different way in our world and flesh to redeem us in forgiveness and live in us by the Spirit through faith.

In the process God is revealed as Trinity. Our being redeemed in the deeds of the Son for us

leads us into glorying in who God is as Trinity, because being saved in Jesus reveals the three persons of God who give us this salvation.

So in the redemption we have in Christ from sin, death, and the devil, we confess and give praise to God today for being Trinity in the renewing of our heart and mind to believe in and confess the truth faith. And in this faith, taught to us by Jesus the Son, through His words and deeds, we have eternal life as we say yes and amen and thanks be to God to Him and for Him. To God be the glory now and forever (Romans 11:36). Amen.