

<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go 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 I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:16-20)

### The Blessings of the Holy Trinity

I read an interesting comment this week: "Trinity Sunday ... is one of the few celebrations of the Christian Year that commemorates a reality and doctrine rather than a person or event." Almost all of our church holidays focus on an event: Christmas is the birth of Jesus, Easter is his resurrection. Even less well-known church holidays like Pentecost or Maundy Thursday commemorate events – the giving of the Holy Spirit or Jesus' new command to love one another. The Festival of Holy Trinity is different. Even though our gospel lesson does record an event, the festival itself is focused more on a doctrine: the one true God reveals himself as one Godhead in three persons.

Now regardless of how you take that quote, all our church holidays do celebrate doctrines. In fact, it's hard to truly celebrate Good Friday without talking about justification or Christmas without talking about the incarnation. But we don't call those holidays by those doctrines. We name them after the events that they celebrate, events which make the doctrines clear and real in our lives. And Trinity Sunday is more than just a celebration of a doctrinal formulation, because the Holy Trinity is not just an abstract idea. It's God. Today, we are celebrating God himself.

Today is a good day for us to do that because of all the things we've been hearing about on the news these last two weeks. We have a God who knows all and sees all. We have a God who has all power in heaven and earth and who does whatever pleases him. What pleases him is giving sinners eternal life. What pleases him is blessing his people. Today is a wonderful opportunity to ask ourselves: **what blessings does the Holy Trinity give us?**

#### I.

After Jesus rose from the dead, he summoned his disciples to Galilee and he gave the church our marching orders. We are to make disciples of all nations, by baptizing and by teaching – by bringing people into the church and then by tending their faith until they die. When Jesus told us to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit he gave us the summary statement of the Trinity. All the persons of the Trinity are one God. But it's natural today to focus on each person. So **what blessings does the Father give us?**

Jesus chose that word very carefully. He could have told us to baptize in the name of the King or the Lord or the Holy One of Israel. But *Father* is a special word. A father has authority and, in many families, when dad gets mad, you're in trouble. But even so, father is not a scary word. It's not a tyrant word. It's a word that speaks of providing and protecting. If it's done right, being a father means showing love that does the hard things like disciplining when it's needed, but that also sacrifices again and again for the children. God created fatherhood and then chose to call himself "our Father in heaven" because he wanted to tap into the rich feelings we have about the men who took care of us and guided us and made us into the people we are.

God the Father is, of course, the Father of Jesus. But he is our Father in the sense that he made us. He is the Creator of all things. What he created, he also takes care of. That's a really important thing to remember today. This has been one of the weirdest and most challenging years that most of us can remember. Does it seem to you like all these protests almost came out of no where? Does it seem to you like we still don't have a handle on what's really going on with COVID 19? God knows what's really going on. God knows what really makes a difference. He has a plan. His creation will not fall. And he is the Father of the church. He adopted us into his family. And our Father in heaven promises us that he is always watching over us.

## II.

Jesus also told us to baptize in the name of the Son. Of course, he meant himself. So **what blessings does the Son give us?** He took care of our greatest need. What is that? With cities burning and people marching, social justice might seem like our greatest need. And it is a real and pressing need. Even conservatives should want our government to do what God designed it to do: create a just society where everyone gets a fair shake in court and where everyone is protected by the power of the state. But you know what? This world will never have perfect justice. Only when Jesus returns, can this world become the perfect society we all wish it was today. Why? Because of sin. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, they made all people sinners. All societies and all governments are made up people.

During these last couple of weeks, God has given all of us an opportunity to reflect on our own sins and how we contribute to the injustice that still exists in our society. Some of us may have become defensive because the accusations of the crowds hit a little too close to home. Some of us may have lashed out because we're tired of political correctness shouting us down. Some of us may become angry that anyone would dare to accuse us of sin. In short, in one way or another, haven't we all sinned this week? That's what makes forgiveness our greatest need. Without it, we would all go to hell and suffer there forever. What good would a world of perfect racial and social and political justice be if all we had to look forward to was dying and going to hell? Jesus came to solve our greatest problem: the sin that condemns us.

In our baptism, God gave us the perfect life of Christ. When God checks our records in heaven, he sees, "Perfect" written in capital letters. In our baptism, God gave us the death of Jesus. God nailed our sinful lives and our sinful natures to his cross. And his blood washed all that sin away. In our baptism, God gave us the resurrection of Jesus. He rose and we are forgiven. He rose and we will rise and live forever.

In our baptisms, we also rise here to live a new and holy life. But God never promised that we can solve all the problems here. In fact, he says the opposite. Jesus said that there will be wars and rumors of wars. Doesn't all the strife and civil unrest in our society feel like a rumor of war? Doesn't all the division in our society – and in every society – threaten peace and prosperity? Sadly, those rumors of war cannot end, injustice cannot end, crime and poverty and corruption and prejudice and hatred cannot end until Jesus comes back.

Now, that doesn't mean we do nothing. Just the opposite. Jesus calls us to let our light shine – which has to include working to make our society more just. But we cannot solve every problem. In fact, as Jesus' return draws closer, it's going to feel like things are getting worse. Jesus didn't come to make this world better. He came to free us from this world. And paradoxically, he calls us to do all that we can to make this world better while we're here. What would that take? Faith. You have to trust Jesus' love and his promise enough to undertake the hopeless task of letting the light of Christ shine. You have to trust Jesus' plan enough to put your life on the line and love and share the gospel. The challenges aren't always going to be what they've been in 2020. But every year, every day, we will face the challenges that God lets come into our lives.

Jesus said, "**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**" He is ruling all things for our good. That means that whatever challenge we face today is what's best for us today. So somehow, in some way that only God can define, we needed COVID 19. We needed the upheaval and the discussions of the last few weeks. Our faith needed to be purified so that we can let go of this life and cling to Jesus. And so that we can reflect the love of Christ in our words and actions while we live here. So, whether our neighbor's needs are caused by society's inequalities or physical injuries or unexpected economic downturns, we Lutherans should never be passive in our society. God sent us to serve him by working for the good of our neighbor.

But, of course, our neighbor's greatest need is to know Jesus. So we live for Jesus when we share the gospel. And all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him. So when we show his love and when we share his good news, he will bless those efforts. We may not understand always what he's doing or how the results are really blessings, but that's not up to us. Jesus will bless those efforts.

## III.

That brings us to the Holy Spirit. **What blessings does the Holy Spirit give us?** That faith, that trust in Jesus that we build our whole lives around. The Holy Spirit works when we hear the gospel – even if it's online rather than in person. The Holy Spirit works when we receive the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine of communion. The Holy Spirit works when our pastor speaks the words and applies the water of holy baptism, and the Spirit keeps on working every time we remember that we are baptized, that we have all the

promises God made in that sacrament. The Holy Spirit works every time we confess our sins and hear that we are, indeed, forgiven. Luther said that he richly and daily forgives all our sins. When we're struggling with our guilt, when we're ashamed of our words and actions and attitudes, the Holy Spirit works through the gospel to assure us that Jesus has taken it all away. And he lightens our hearts.

When we struggle with life, the Spirit of God reminds us that our Lord is walking with us and he gives us real comfort. Now, there may be days when it feels like our comfort is slow in coming and our faith is hanging on by its fingernails, but without the Holy Spirit that faith would be gone and we would be lost. And the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of prayer. St. Paul tells us that he speaks in groans that words cannot express. He leads us to go to God for help and comfort. And when our life is so painful and our heart is so broken and our mind is so confused that we don't even know what we should pray, he offers the prayers we need. And Jesus advocates for us in heaven. And the Father hears and answers every one of those prayers.

And the Holy Spirit gives us the desire to serve God with a new and holy life. Then he blesses the world through our acts of love. And he gives us whatever gifts we have to share the gospel and to show the love of Christ. We are the Christians that we are because of his work in our hearts. God isn't done working on us! But every time we hear the gospel, the Spirit continues that work..

Don't we need all that work of the Holy Spirit today? For a moment, it seemed like the whole COVID 19 discussion was overshadowed, but do you think we're done talking about it? A couple of weeks ago, we were told that demonstrations only spread the pandemic, now politicians are marching with the protesters. In a world where the news gives us whiplash, we need the Holy Spirit to guide our prayers and we need to storm the throne of grace with those prayers. We need God to strengthen our trust in him so that we cling to him whatever the news is going to tell us tomorrow. We need the Spirit to make us people who shine the light of Christ every day and in every situation.

You know what? That means we need God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, today as much as ever. Truly, we've always needed that one God in three persons. And we cannot even count the blessings he gives us. I could preach a sermon two or three times as long as this one, and still have more to say. But I hope you see today that the doctrine of the Trinity is no abstraction. It's no exercise in mental gymnastics. It's hard and it's confusing because it's real. It's the only true God who intervenes in history and saves a dying world. That God comes into our messy lives and changes them and us. Celebrate the love of the Holy Trinity today. Trust in that love all your life. And demonstrate that love every day. Amen.