

# "The Trinity of Love"

John 3:1-17

May 31, 2015

The Holy Trinity

Have you ever awakened and just not felt or acted like yourself? Been overly grumpy or especially happy so that you acted strangely? Have you ever noticed this same thing in someone else -- that they just weren't being themselves? Have you ever said to someone, "Hey, that's just not like you"? They may have looked the same. The name on the driver's license would have been the same. But the truth of the matter is that we know *who* people are, not by mere physical description or name, but by how they act and what they *do*. What we *do* expresses who we are.

Today, we celebrate Trinity Sunday, a festival on the church calendar that is unique in that it celebrates a doctrine rather than an event. It is tempting to try and know God simply by describing His characteristics. For example, there is but one God. The main creed of God's people in the Old Testament boldly confesses, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." This theologically correct statement is not politically correct in our day and age. For it means that other gods -- the gods of the cults, the god of Islam, the gods of Buddhism, Hinduism, and other popular eastern religions -- are all false gods. They are non-existent and can do nothing. As true God says even more clearly through the prophet, Isaiah, "I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God."

Yet, the Scriptures, while declaring the one God, also describe a threeness within this oneness. The Scriptures speak of God as Father who possesses all divine attributes and powers. The Scriptures speak of God as Son who possesses all divine attributes and powers. The Scriptures speak of God as Holy Spirit who possesses all divine attributes and powers. Yet, as we confessed in the Athanasian Creed, "So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three gods but one God."

Yet all of these theological truths, while describing God, do not give us an adequate picture of who God is. We can really know God only by what He does. He shows us who He is by what He does. Some see God as an indifferent deity who is far away from the real life of this world and does nothing. Others see God as an angry judge whose only action is to spoil our fun with His rules and gleefully punish those who break them. But the Bible says, "God is love" (1 John 4:8,16) and His actions show nothing but love.

Our text says, "For God so loved the world..." And why shouldn't He? God the Father created the world out of nothing by the power of His Word. God the Father loves that which He created. He is no "absentee landlord". He has shown care and continues to care for that which He created. His love is so great that He does that even for those who have rejected Him as Father. As Jesus said, "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matt. 5:45)

But that's only a small example of the Father's love. The extent of His love is much greater. Although He created everything to be "very good" and although humanity destroyed the goodness and perfection of His creation, God the Father continued to love us sinful rebels. Although His holiness could not bear to have sin and imperfection in His presence, He chose to love us. Instead of destroying us as we deserved, He chose to redeem us.

Imagine if you owned land and building materials and built yourself a house. Then imagine someone taking it away from you and ruining it. Would you be willing then to pay a high cost to buy back what you had made and which already belonged to you? Only if you loved it a lot. "Redeem" means to "buy back." God the Father chose to pay the price for creatures He had created and who belonged to Him, but who had been taken away from Him by sin. "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son."

God the Son loved, but why should He? Humanity had chosen to rebel against God and reject His love. Instead of living as dearly beloved children under the perfect care of our Heavenly

Father, we chose to go our own way and do our own thing, thus setting ourselves up to be His enemies and the objects of His anger and punishment. Yet the Son of God chose to set aside the full use of His divine power, came down from heaven, and become one of us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

His love was more than an attitude or pious sounding words. His love was carried through in action. He was lifted up on a cross, as our text says, and made to bear the sin of all people for all time and all the punishment that such sin deserved from a holy God. As Isaiah had predicted of Him years ago, "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." By voluntarily laying down His life out of love for you, the piercing, crushing, and punishment that humanity deserves has been given to Him. By His suffering and death, humanity has been spiritually healed. By conquering death and coming back to life again, Jesus has won victory over death and obtained life that lasts forever for all of humanity.

Our text says twice that this eternal life, full of ecstasy and joy beyond our wildest imagination and free from all pain and suffering is for those who believe. There is only one problem with this great spiritual truth and Jesus alludes to it early in the text: "no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." In other words, as creatures steeped in our sin, we are spiritually dead and unable to enter the kingdom of God to everlasting life. We cannot even know what Jesus has done for us because we are spiritually blind. Even though Jesus loved the world, gave His life for the world, and won life for the world, if we don't know about it and put our trust in Him, it does us no good. It's like if someone put a million dollars in a bank account with your name on it, but you never heard about it. You could die broke, not because you didn't have money, but because you didn't know about the money given to you.

What can you do to find out the great things God the Father and God the Son have done for you out of their great love for you? Absolutely nothing! Jesus says, "Flesh gives birth to flesh." Sinful humanity gives birth to more sinful humanity and nothing changes that. It doesn't matter how much you want to know God or try to know God. It won't do any good, just like it wouldn't do any good to try and help a deaf man hear music by playing it louder or help a blind man see by turning up the lights. Something has to be done to you and for you.

Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." God the Holy Spirit loved, but how could He when we were dead in sin? Through the water of Holy Baptism, He causes you to be born again and gives you new spiritual life by connecting you to all that Jesus has done on your behalf. The redemption Jesus won for the world on the cross now becomes *your* redemption. *Your* sin is washed away. The everlasting life that Jesus obtained in the open tomb has become *your* everlasting life.

What a truly amazing thing this is for you and me living here way out here in Montana! Jesus says, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." You can't tell where the wind is going to blow from or where it is going to blow to. You can hear the sound and see it work, but you cannot control it. In the same way, we cannot tell where the Spirit of God is going to work, but we have seen Him at work here in our midst. When you repent, confess your sins, and trust Christ for forgiveness, the Holy Spirit is at work enabling that. When you hear the Word of God read and preached and believe not only that it is true but that it is true for you, the Holy Spirit is at work enabling that. When you confess your faith, here in the congregation and out there in the world, the Holy Spirit is at work enabling that for the Bible says, "no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor. 12:3) You didn't make these things happen, nor did you make the Holy Spirit

do these things. But the Holy Spirit, out of His great love for you, blowing where He will has blown here into your lives, forever changing them.

This is not a day for dry and dusty theological speculation about the nature of God. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not something to be dissected for the purpose of comprehending it or explaining it. That could never be. Rather, this doctrine is something that vitally impacts our lives for it shows who God is by what He has done, is doing, and will do for each of us. To sum it up, let us with all the saints of all time echo those words of the Introit for this Trinity Sunday: "Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity. Let us give glory to him because he has shown mercy to us." Amen.