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Matthew 28:16-20:

“110-Foot Fall of Faith”

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“110-Foot Fall of Faith”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

Not too long ago, I came across an illustration based on a true story that Greg Asimakoupoulos wrote. He writes,

“In May 1995, Randy Reid, a thirty-four-year-old construction worker, was welding on top of a nearly completed water tower outside of Chicago. According to writer Melissa Ramsdell, Reid unhooked his safety gear to reach for some pipes when a metal cage slipped and bumped the scaffolding on which he stood. The scaffolding tipped, and Reid lost his balance. He fell 110 feet, landing face down on a pile of dirt, just missing rocks and construction debris. A fellow worker called 911. When paramedics arrived, they found Reid conscious, moving, and complaining of a sore back. Apparently, the fall didn’t cost Reid his sense of humor. As paramedics carried him on a backboard to the ambulance, Reid had one request: ‘Don’t drop me.’ (Doctors later said Reid came away from the accident with just a bruised lung.) Sometimes we resemble that construction worker. God protects us from harm in a 110-foot fall, but we’re still nervous about 3-foot heights.”

I. Refresher Course on The Triune God

It is undoubtedly a great miracle and mystery that Randy Reid survived such a fall. One might be bold to claim that divine intervention must have been involved. No matter the explanation, it is a blessing that Reid lived to not only tell the tale but to make a joke on the way to the hospital. I’ve shared this story with you this Trinity Sunday because we, too, have a more important mystery to look at. That mystery is who God is. This has been considered and debated since the days of the early church. At the present time, in a culture surrounded by all sorts of different notions of who God is, it is important to understand what we believe, teach, and confess when we speak about the Triune God. For many of you, this may be a simple review. Regardless, what we believe about God’s saving work stands or falls on the Trinitarian and Christian understanding of God.

We can rest assured that this mystery has already been looked at deeply. All the “evidence,” so to speak, has been compiled in what we know as the Athanasian Creed. Here is a part of the creed we are about to recite. It states,

“And the Christian faith is this, that we worship one God in three persons and three persons in one God, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the

substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit.”

This powerful confession was brought about in defense against the heresy of Arianism that denied the divinity of Jesus and claimed that Jesus was created by God the Father. That early church heresy still rears its ugly head in the form of Unitarianism and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. So, if this was at one point up for debate, why do we believe what we believe? For one thing, the bible explicitly teaches us that God is three persons, one in the same and of one essence.

The doctrine of the Trinity can be proved and understood only from the word of God. Colossians 2:9 states, “For in him (Christ) the fullness of deity dwells bodily.” This is only one of many verses that supports the doctrine of the Trinity. Who God is, God’s love for us, and His activity in His creation are crucial to everything we believe in. The supposed controversies surrounding the Trinity are almost always about Christ because Christ lies at the heart of the Gospel.

Why wouldn’t this unbelieving world attack the cornerstone of our faith by trying to remove His deity? That way, we lose confidence in His saving work! If Jesus is not God, then He never acted on our behalf to redeem us. If we deny Christ as He has been revealed to us through the Word, then we have no reason to be in church, study God’s word, or be sure of our salvation. Unfortunately, this is precisely what this unbelieving world desires so that it may justify its sin. If we wish to combat these heresies by understanding and confirming the Trinity, we must look to the scriptures starting with the creation account.

II. Creation in Love

A common argument is that Christ was not present at the creation. Some argue that the Father is somehow different or superior because of this. However, there is no case to be made against the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit at the creation. Jesus confirms this in John 17:5 where He says, “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.” The presence of the Holy Spirit is also testified about, most notably in Genesis 1:2, which states, “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”

We know from the testimony of scripture that the creation included the presence of the fullness of the Godhead. If the Trinity was not present at the creation, then God could not possibly be all that is said of Him in His Word. Because we come to know God through His names, words, and works, we describe Him by His attributes that our faith

can grasp, always including the doctrine of the Trinity in those descriptions. Using the example of love, I'd like to share this quote from the book *The Christian Difference*,

“The life of the Holy Trinity is, as said, not static, but each person moves out to the others, giving Himself completely to the others: the Father begetting, the Son begotten, and the Holy Spirit proceeding in ways that are coeternal and coequal. When the Bible says that ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8), it therefore cannot mean that He exists statically as love, since love is always about another. Love requires an object, and each person of the Trinity has always had two other persons toward which to direct His love. Thus, God can love within Himself without loving Himself selfishly at all. God’s Trinity reveals to us how the infinitely tender God has been infinite love, has loved, and has been loved from eternity before the universe was ever created.”

Try wrapping your head around that one! The trinity is something so unfathomable to us that this is beyond comprehension. However, from the truth of scripture, we can conclude that God did not create us for His own glory or goodness, and He certainly did not create us because He was lonely or lacking. As Francis Pieper put it, “God created us in His image so that we would know Him, conform to His will, and in communion with Him, enjoy bliss.” Though this image is lost, through the love of God, salvation is gained by the cross at Calvary. This leads us to our Gospel lesson that covers the Great Commission, which reads, “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, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

III. The Triune God’s Love Demonstrated in Holy Baptism

There is tremendous significance to this command from Jesus. You may recall that another shocking piece of evidence to support the doctrine of the Triune God is found in the Baptism of Jesus Christ. The Baptism of Christ recorded for us the perfect embodiment of the Triune God revealed in glory from Heaven. The testimony from the Father and the descending of the Holy Spirit makes it undeniable that not only is Jesus the Son of God, but He is of the same essence as the Father and the Holy Spirit. It also depicts the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit in the salvation of those Jesus came to save. All the glorious truth of the mercy of God through Jesus Christ is on display at His baptism. How fitting it is that Jesus, in turn, would command His disciples to baptize all nations, not in the name of John, not in the name of Jesus alone, not in the name of the Father alone, not in the name of the Spirit alone, but in the name of the Triune God, the great, “I Am,” the One in Three. It’s as if this is one final confirmation after all Jesus had done during His ministry and on the cross that He is whom He says He is. In His divine

authority, He gives a command for washing of regeneration that could only be fulfilled in Him.

In that command being fulfilled, we now reap the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection in that baptism. Baptism incorporates us in a relationship with Christ Jesus where there is no condemnation. We are no longer strangers to his death and resurrection; we have been brought into them. In Christ's love for us, He shows us His goodness, which reveals Him as being deeply attached to sinful humanity in which He sacrifices everything so that we might have forgiveness. So, if we reject the Trinity, we do not know God's kindness. Denying the Trinity means rejecting God's divine will and everything that results from it.

IV. The Final Destination

Trusting in all this can sometimes feel like Randy Reid's 110-foot fall. Our culture has all sorts of ideas of whom God is supposed to be, and they are constantly at war with what we believe, teach, and confess. We are also guilty of taking this doctrine lightly. It's easy to tell our colleagues about the redemptive work of Jesus, but it can be intimidating when it comes to the specific doctrines of what we believe. Perhaps we don't want to be the reason why a person doesn't believe, or maybe we doubt the possibility of a Triune God. This lack of trust opens the world to heresy and can bring us to believe in the self to seek our salvation from worldly ailments and sin. Unfortunately, this can lead us to lose our faith altogether. Doubts are not uncommon to Christians. But doubts left unchecked bring destruction. The devil uses this strategically to interrupt progress in sanctification and the justification through faith in Christ that the Holy Spirit has made in our lives. If the devil got what he wanted, we would all suffer like him.

Thankfully, God has given us protection from these heresies. He has given us His Word and promises to rely on when something confuses us or may not be so clear. He has given us His Son on the cross. It takes great faith to believe in such concepts that are so beyond our understanding. Believing that Jesus was present at creation, believing that He died and resurrected for our sins, believing that in our baptisms, we have died and risen with Him, and believing that God is One in Three are all things that make us foolish to the world. But the world's wisdom is nothing compared to the wisdom of our all-knowing and all-loving God, who, as Paul stated in 1st Corinthians 1:27, "chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;"

I urge you, brothers and sisters, not to be afraid to speak on such things. This and other doctrines of the faith are incredibly important as foundations of what we believe and how we understand God's Word. And if you are feeling confused about this, don't

hesitate to take your concerns to God in prayer that He might give you the answers you seek through His Word.

Every day we take this 110-foot fall of faith. By living in our baptism, we unbuckle the harness that attaches us to this world by trusting that the Lord will keep us safe and keep His promises. We trust that what He has revealed in His inerrant Word is righteous and true. And amid that, we take our 3-foot falls too. God never promised us that this life would be easy. But He did promise us that through faith in Christ, our final destination is to be in the Triune God's presence and love forever. So, whether it be a 110-foot or 3-foot fall of faith, the Lord will never drop us unless we drop Him.

Amen.

Seminarian Lucas Abbott