

TRINITY SUNDAY

May 26, 2024

St. John 3:1-17:

## **The Only True God**

- I. The Moment with Nicodemus.
- II. Not to Condemn. (v. 17a)
- III. Blessed Redundancy. (vv. 15-17)

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St. John 3:1-17

Dear Friends in Christ,

In his Large Catechism, Martin Luther stated: "...we could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from Him we see nothing but an angry terrible judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit." And so, the importance of confessing the Trinity.

Question 94 from Luther's Small Catechism asks: "Who is the only True God?" Answer: "The only true God is the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three distinct persons in one divine being. The Holy Trinity."

And then this from "The Formula of Concord", another one of the great confessions of the Lutheran Church: "Thus the entire holy Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, directs all men to Christ as to the book of life in whom they are to seek the Father's eternal election (Book of Concord, 627.66)."

This is, of course, Trinity Sunday. Some might be wondering why we're taking such a basic approach to what we know and confess. We're taking this very basic approach because what we know and confess - based on Scripture and expressed in our Confessions - are quickly fading away. Everything you're going to hear you've heard a multitude of times. But it's not just something to hear. It's something we're to take with us every day of our lives in this world and into eternity where we'll see, face to face . . .

## THE ONLY TRUE GOD

### I. The Moment with Nicodemus.

Please hear, once again, verses 1-6 of our text:

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Dear friends, Jesus is speaking of Baptism. There are those who say that the reference to being born of water is a reference to the amniotic fluid that is expelled from a mother during the process of birthing. This is ridiculous. And with that is this view expressed by A. T. Robertson: "Calvin makes water and spirit refer to the one act (apart from the use of water)." (A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures In The New Testament, Broadman Press, Vol. V, pp. 45-46.) Never.

In Acts 2:38 Peter says, "Repent and be baptized (to use water) every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." The promises connected to the use of water "in the name of Jesus Christ" are the forgiveness of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit - the **Third Person of the Trinity** - the One Who works faith and sustains faith. Water - Spirit - born again! And note this: To be baptized in the name of Jesus is to be baptized in the name of the Triune God. You know the words, as Jesus commands: "Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19)." The only imperative command for Baptism!

While Nicodemus questioned this, Jesus would place certain truths before him for his understanding, and for ours. Truths that address our terminal illness, because we are all terminally ill - because of sin.

## II. Not to Condemn. (v. 17a)

Verse 17 of our text begins with "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world...". The reference to "God" is a reference to the Father, the first Person of the Trinity, who sent His Son, Jesus, the second person of the Trinity. "Not...to condemn the world" refers to the First Coming.

The purpose of the First Coming goes back to what the angel announced to Joseph regarding Mary's pregnancy: "She will bear a Son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins (Jn. 1:21)." It's simple but mostly ignored or rejected by much of the church! This is why Christ came to earth. And that goes back to God's promise of Genesis 3: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he (the Christ) will crush your head, and you will strike his heel (Gen. 3:15)." This is first promise of the First Coming of Christ who would enter this world for one specific purpose: "He will save his people from their sins (Jn. 1:21)."

It is the great doctrine of the Law that confronts us with our sin; confronts us with the fact that there's not a certain goodness within us that will cause God to love us and give us a better world. The world is decaying and dying. It's "The wages of sin."

I have repeatedly stated that my generation, in light of World War II and its aftermath, grew up with the thinking that we were going to make this world a "wonderful world" and overcome conflict and war. The ultimate goals of life were to be happy and comfortable and at peace. We were far removed from reality. Since World War II we have witnessed the growth of the most intensified violence and corruption; the greatest disrespect for life - ever; and all that globally. We have watched the majority of the church walk away from the reality of what's happening. Jesus said it: "And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Matt. 24:12-14)."

There is not one speck of human history, down to this moment, that can underscore some innate quality in humans that will give us our Utopia. The fact of the matter is, we have been moving into a dystopia. The Oxford Dictionary defines dystopia as "an imagined place or state in which everything is unpleasant or bad, typically a totalitarian or environmentally degraded one." And Webster defines it as "An imaginary place where people lead dehumanized and often fearful lives." Imaginary? No.

## III. Blessed Redundancy. (vv. 15-17)

The fact is - the **real** joy and comfort of every moment is the great doctrine of the Scriptures: the Gospel. It's The promise that sheds the clearest light on how the Father, Son and Holy Spirit worked together for our forgiveness; words that lift us to eternal joy.

Jesus said, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you (Jn. 14:26)." And with that the truth most can't or don't want to hear: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you (Jn. 14:27)." People don't want to hear that: *Not as the world gives do I give.* People want what they can get out this world. They enslave themselves to their earthly wants and end up with a grave. The Word of God is clear and simple, but ignored or seen as silly: "By grace (God's undeserved love) you have been saved through faith (in Christ's payment of our sins)...(Eph.2:8)." We have an eternal Kingdom of happiness and comfort and peace.

The fallen world never will attain any state of permanent peace and contentment! The power of man-made positive thinking is consistently buried with the countless bones of sinful humans. We need something greater - infinitely greater - than the way humans think and reason.

The Almighty Triune God has fulfilled that need. In the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> verses of our text Jesus says, "so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." Then comes the glorious 16<sup>th</sup> verse: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." In the 17<sup>th</sup> verse Jesus says, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world (the first time!), but in order that the world might be saved through him." And if we travel to the 36<sup>th</sup> verse of John 3 Jesus says, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." Believe! Nothing here about humans reaching a heaven on earth.

As far as our ability to understand and grasp the depth of this...well, I believe most here know this Scripture: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways (Rom 11:33)! No human can search out His judgements. God is never - ever - subject to the scrutiny of sinful humans.

There is only One God, the Triune God. This is the One who declares: "Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no savior (Is. 43:10b-11)." This is the One who comforts us in Christ: "I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins (Is. 43:25)." This is the Great God we confess; the One and Only True God; the Triune God.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott