

Rev. Dan Welch The Holy Trinity 6-7-20 Text- Acts 2:14a, 22-36 (10:30)

Every year after we speak together that mind-boggling, tongue-twisting confession of faith; the Athanasian Creed, I always feel like asking: "Are there any questions?" I know I have them! The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, this whole creed sounds incomprehensible! It truly boggles my little mind to try to take in how vast, how infinite God is. Just the fact that He is eternal is something that literally hurts my brain when I stop and deeply ponder this truth: God has always been, always! Even before the creation of the world, before the universe - there was God. There was nothing before Him. He has *always* been. Wow! It reminds me of the story of the student who once asked Martin Luther, "What was God doing before He created the world?" And Dr. Luther replied, "God was cutting canes to whack people who ask Him useless questions to which we haven't been given the answers."

Well, maybe Luther's right and it is a useless question, but it's one I hope God answers for us someday in heaven! At any rate, for now, let's talk about the Holy Trinity; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, on this Trinity Sunday! Most especially, I would like to focus on this question: "What does it mean that the Triune God is at work in our lives for us today?"

To start out, when we talk about the Holy Trinity, it's usually to emphasize the distinctive roles of each of the three persons that make up the one true God. For example, we usually think of God the Father in terms of His work of creating the world and sustaining it. This is what we confess in the Small Catechism when we say, "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that he has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason, and all my senses, and still takes care of them." Good, solid theology that I'm sure you remember from your days in Confirmation, right??

Next, we usually think of Jesus, the Son in terms of His work in saving us from our sins and restoring us to a proper relationship with God. That's what we confess in the Small Catechism when we say, "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil." Familiar words, right?

And then we think of the Holy Spirit mainly in terms of His work in bringing us to faith through Word and the Sacraments and strengthening and keeping us in that faith. This is what we confess in the Small Catechism when we say, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel,

enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

There is certainly nothing wrong with thinking in this way; that is, each of the three persons of the Holy Trinity doing their own thing for us. It comes right from God’s Word and it’s true. But it’s also interesting to note the way the Bible sometimes emphasizes what the three persons of the Trinity do **together** as the one true God, not just what they do **individually**. This is what Peter has in mind as he speaks to the crowd that gathered to see what was going on when God poured out the Holy Spirit on Jesus’ followers on the day of Pentecost.

What’s actually surprising about Peter’s Pentecost sermon is that it’s not really about the Holy Spirit. It’s about **Jesus**. And so that makes it a very appropriate text for this first Sunday *after* Pentecost, Trinity Sunday. Because in preaching about Jesus, Peter shows us how God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work together to bring about our salvation.

Our text begins with Peter emphasizing the fundamental and foundational fact that God raised Jesus from the dead. (Pause)

As I read our text for today this past week I was struck by the fact that Peter doesn’t feel the need to **argue** the point that Jesus rose from the dead. He simply states it as a fact whose truth can be confirmed by witnesses (22-24, 32). Peter expects that his audience will know and accept Jesus’ resurrection as a fact.

Peter’s point, then, is not to establish the **fact** of the resurrection, but to explain its **impact** and **significance**. What does it **mean** for my life that Jesus rose from the dead? To that point, Peter quotes from Psalm 16 to show that David foresaw the resurrection of Jesus and He understood what it would mean (vv 25–28). He says, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; ²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. ²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

David recognized that his Lord and Messiah Jesus was beside him. He was with him now and always. Therefore, his faith would not be shaken by all the hardships that came at him in life (v 25). And David certainly encountered his fair share of hardships! Not only the familiar story of his facing the giant, Goliath as a youth, but also at a young age being on the run for his life from jealous king Saul. Even after David became king, it seemed like he was always fighting in wars against Israel’s enemies, and then later in life David nearly lost his throne **and** his life due to an insurrection led by his own son, Absalom. But despite these set-backs and challenges, David expressed **joy** because of his

confidence in the coming Messiah, the Christ and hope in the certainty that God would not abandon Jesus (vv 26–27). He knew that Jesus' death would take away the sin that separated David and all people from God, so if God did not abandon Jesus, and if he had been joined to Jesus as we are in Baptism, God would not abandon him either.

In verse 28 of our text David declared his certainty that in Jesus, God would reveal to him the “paths of life”. He said, “You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.” In other words, joy was on the horizon for David because of the coming Messiah, Jesus.

After that, Peter reminds his hearers that David was a prophet and that he had received a promise from God that one of his descendants would sit on his throne forever (vv 29–30). So in that way “he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ.” And this Messiah is Jesus (vv 31–32). Then Peter finishes his point about what David believed about Christ by citing the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead and is seated at the right hand of the Father as being the very **evidence** of God's approval of Jesus (vv 22, 24, 32–33), the very One whom some of them had crucified and killed (v 23).

Okay, so what does this all mean? Only then does Peter return to the meaning of Pentecost, which, again, is not ultimately about the Holy Spirit, but rather about how the Holy Trinity **works together** for our salvation. And that salvation, happens because God has made Jesus both Lord and Messiah.

Peter's sermon to the crowd that day showed what Pentecost meant for them. The fact that all those present had themselves seen the fulfillment of God's promise to pour out His Holy Spirit on His people in the age of the Messiah is God's **proof** to them that God had made Jesus to be both Lord and Christ, that is, the Messiah (v 36). And **that meant** they had all the same blessings David had proclaimed in Psalm 16.

But what does it mean for **us** today to know that Jesus is Lord and Messiah? The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost means the exact same thing for you and me that it meant for David and Peter: It means that we can recognize that since our Lord and Messiah, Jesus, is beside us, our faith does not need be shaken by all the hardships that **we** encounter in life (v 25).

And what a year of hardships 2020 has been! It seems like an entire decade and we're just over five months in! In January we had the untimely and devastating loss of Kobe Bryant, a widely admired sports celebrity and family man. In February we witnessed on tv some of the wildfires that had been consuming Australia and its wildlife: An estimated 500 million animals lost their lives, including 25, 000 koalas. Then in March the Coronavirus pandemic

really began making its impact known in our country, bringing death or serious illness to many and a radical change of life for every one of us, but perhaps most especially for you our 2020 graduates. And then just when pandemic restrictions are beginning to loosen, rioting and destruction has been breaking out for over a week all over our country in response to George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis.

Talk about hardships! And I haven't even gotten to all the many and various problems each of us has to deal with as individuals: Sickness, stress, conflict, financial worries, doubts about the future, and more.

So, again, what does Peter's Pentecost day sermon mean for us *today*? What does it mean for *us* to know that Jesus is Lord and Messiah? What does his message mean for you as graduates, getting ready to move on to the next exciting stage in your life? It means that you, me, and all of us can experience joy and hope no matter what comes our way. That's because our confidence is in God's Messiah and our certainty is that God will not abandon us.

"God is our refuge and strength a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress." (Ps. 46: 1-2, 11)

Jesus' death on the cross has reconciled us to God by forgiving the sin; our sin, that separated us from Him. Now, since we have been joined to Jesus in Baptism and God did not abandon Him, we know he will not leave us in death— either death now on earth or eternal death in hell (vv 26-27).

It means that we can know that in Jesus, God has revealed to us the "paths of life." Jesus' death and resurrection is the path by which God will lead us to eternal joy in his presence (v 28).

On this Festival of the Holy Trinity, God's Word reminds us that, while we often focus on the separate and distinctive roles of the three persons that comprise the one true God, it is wonderfully true, as Peter reminds us, that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all at work together to accomplish their common will: our salvation. God is with you always. And I say this especially to you, the graduates of 2020: He will never leave you or forsake you, so you can face the future and live your life every single day with God-given confidence! Amen.

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