

The Feast of the Holy Trinity

May 30, 2021

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C: **Amen.**

Scripture Readings

Micah 7:18-20

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity
and passing over transgression
for the remnant of his inheritance?

He does not retain his anger forever,
because he delights in steadfast love.

He will again have compassion on us;
he will tread our iniquities underfoot.

You will cast all our sins
into the depths of the sea.

You will show faithfulness to Jacob
and steadfast love to Abraham,
as you have sworn to our fathers
from the days of old.

Acts 2:14a, 22-36

But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know – this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him,

“‘I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;
therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
my flesh also will dwell in hope.

For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One see corruption.

You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

“Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

“The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
until I make your enemies your footstool.””

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

John 3:1-17

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. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Hymn: *LSB 507, Holy, Holy, Holy*



1 Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly! Lord God Al - might - y!
2 Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly! All the saints a - dore Thee,
3 Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly! Though the dark - ness hide Thee,
4 Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly! Lord God Al - might - y!



Ear - ly in the morn - ing our song shall rise to Thee;
Cast - ing down their gold - en crowns a - round the glass - y sea;
Though the eye of sin - ful man Thy glo - ry may not see,
All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth and sky and sea.



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly, mer - ci - ful and might - y!
Cher - u - bim and ser - a - phim fall - ing down be - fore Thee,
On - ly Thou art ho - ly; there is none be - side Thee,
Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly, mer - ci - ful and might - y!



God in three per - sons, bless - ed Trin - i - ty!
Which wert and ev - er - more shalt be.
Per - fect in pow'r, in love, and pu - ri - ty.
God in three per - sons, bless - ed Trin - i - ty!

Sermon

I once heard another pastor say that there are two words he will not use. The first word is “starving.” He made the point that he never says he is “starving” because that is just not true. There are millions of people in the world who are actually “starving” and none of us belong to that category. So, it’s more appropriate to say “I’m really hungry” than to say, “I’m starving.”

The second word he mentioned he will not use is the word, “excruciating” when describing pain. The reason: in the Roman world, back in the day of Jesus, the word “excruciating” in terms of pain was only used for the kind of pain experienced at crucifixion. There was only one kind of “excruciating” pain and that is when a man is “lifted up” and nailed to a tree, bleeding, suffocating, and dying. That’s excruciating.

Now I mention this “lifting up” to experience “excruciating” pain because John mentions Jesus being lifted up. John says that Moses lifted up a bronze snake in the desert for the children of Israel to gaze upon so that they would not die from the serpent’s poisonous bites. And one might think that the reference to Jesus being “lifted up” means that we praise Him, give Him glory, and all what we give to God because, well, He deserves it. The psalms talk about praising God as “lifting up His name,” so maybe John means Jesus is lifted up so we praise him and turn to him in faith?

Well yes, but it’s also more than that. The lifting up John wants us to know is the lifting up of Jesus on the cross – to do what He did – to experience the excruciating pain of death that can only be described by such a painful sounding word so that we may experience a blessed “lifting up” that can’t even be imagined as we sit here in the pew right here and now.

In the Gospel text for today Jesus takes that old story and shows how it will be fulfilled through the work of the Savior. Jesus says, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

Now, going back to the part in the text that mentions “being lifted up,” Jesus uses this word in two different ways. It is used of His being lifted up upon the cross, and it is also used of His being lifted up into glory at the time of His Ascension into heaven. You see, there was a “double lifting up” in the life of Jesus. He was lifted up on the cross where he experienced that excruciating pain, and He was lifted up in glory. One took him to death – the other took him to heaven. Both were for a purpose. Both were to show us what we endure in faith. Both show us that believing in Jesus really has a two-fold reality in our lives – death and glory.

Have you ever thought of it that way – that faith in Jesus takes us to death? It “lifts us up to the cross” like Jesus was lifted up. And as we look at our Savior through the eyes of faith, we have been healed and made whole again. In order for there to be life there must first be death – namely the death of ourselves. We put to death our sinful ways. We put to death the old Adam within us by repentance and contrition. Christ’s death leads to Christ’s life. Our life in Christ leads to death, which leads to life with Christ. Admittedly this is a bit convoluted. But that’s life. It’s the Christian paradox we have talked about many times before.

And really, when has your life not been convoluted? Life to death to life – that seems to be the pattern. It's not a coincidence that our faith speaks about dying and rising to life each and every day. On a personal level, we die in our faith all the time -- in faith we put to death all evil desires and sinful lust and we rise to life in Christ. That's faith and that happens in our baptisms each day. As Christians we live for the lifting up of Christ – we rely on that lifting up because of our sins. The lifting up on the cross is the most important for you and me – but that is not the one we often live for.

Too many times, in our lives that aren't focused on the cross – but rather on things that involve our own lifting up, we desire to experience the other lifting up in glory. Sometimes, instead of Calvary's Holy Mountain, we focus on that mount of the Ascension, but not gazing up at Jesus, rather, climbing to the highest heights ourselves. We put Jesus' "lifting up" aside so that we can do what God's people did way back in the book of Genesis – build a tower to make a name for themselves. Sinners like you and me like to glory in ourselves. We want others to lift us up, to praise us. From this we get the feeling of satisfaction and so we long for it all the more. We long for it more than longing for how our Lord desires to give you the very result of why He was lifted up on Calvary and then lifted up before the disciples on the Ascension. For us, our lifting up becomes more important than God's.

On this Trinity Sunday, we lift up the name of our Lord – not our own name. We call God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We don't have three Gods. We have one God with three persons in one God. We can't completely comprehend how that works, and so it is with many things when it comes to our Lord. We can't understand it, but we can sometimes see it looking back. Out of tragedy the Lord can strengthen faith, a thing we have witnessed time and time again.

For example, you may remember back in 2015 Nepal experienced devastating earthquakes that displaced thousands upon thousands of people. This sounds just awful. I remember very well when those earthquakes happened; but what I only learned recently, many refugees would end up settling in the St. Louis area. Many of those refugees would end up leaving their false gods – many of them Hindu before they came to the United States – and be baptized into the Christian faith. Twenty-one Nepali refugees were baptized at one congregation in St. Louis on one particular Sunday alone.

The pain of loss and suffering for those who have lost everything in two very strong earthquakes must be devastating – I'm not going to say excruciating. But there is one – the one Lord – three persons in one God – who knows excruciating. And He knows it for each and every one of those sons and daughters from Nepal. This, I think, is what we mean when we say that the Lord works in mysterious ways: the process is mysterious, but the goal and end result are not a mystery at all. He is calling us all to faith in Christ.

We might think that whatever we are going through right now does not compare to what those people experienced, but we have our devastating troubles. Relationships, jobs, fear generated from the unknown future that is ahead of us, lingering questions about COVID-19, troubles with health, troubles with finances... you name it. The pain is quite a lot. In the midst of all the pain, the fear, the anxiety, we are not left alone. Our eyes are lifted up to the one who knows a greater pain. An "excruciating" pain.

That pain was more than we will ever know – and it is a pain that knows all other pains. It's a pain that would mean anything but pain for each and every one of us. It's a pain that would have a purpose – not just for the cross but also for that second lifting up on the day of ascension. And now, as we in the New Testament church can see both of those "lifted ups" with eyes wide open – we know that it all means we are lifted up in God's grace to heaven by grace through faith. What a blessing God's excruciating experience is for us.

To complete the picture, we remember the words of God before Christ was lifted up, these words of the prophet Micah. "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression? ... He delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us... You will cast

our sins into the depths of the sea." God forgives; He has compassion; He passes over sin like He passed over the faithful Hebrews on Passover, the angel of death leaving them untouched. Christ himself is our Passover lamb, and because he was lifted up, because his blood marks us, the angel of death passes over us too. He delights in steadfast love, faithful to His promise and His people. "Who is a God like you?" Micah asks rhetorically. There is no other God like Him, and so we use Trinity Sunday to remember and articulate this faith, to know who our God is: the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and no one and nothing else, ever.

So while there might be words we will never use, let's also find words we will always use. Words like those of our baptism, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Jesus lifted up for you. Jesus death for your life. Jesus loves you this I know, for the Bible tells me so. In a world where Jesus is less and less important, we will lift His name on high. He was lifted up for us, so that we live. If the point of Trinity Sunday is that we can accurately and faithfully know who our God is and tell others who it is, then we can do no better than pointing to Jesus of Nazareth, lifted up on the cross so that we should not perish, so that we should have eternal life, so that we might be saved through him.

Lord's Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

**For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

P: Almighty and everlasting God, You have given us grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith and to worship the Unity in the power of the Divine Majesty. Keep us steadfast in this faith and defend us from all adversities; for You, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign, one God, now and forever.

C: Amen.

All: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

P: Let us bless the Lord!

C: Thanks be to God!

P: The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

C: Amen.