

OPENING SENTENCE:

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; Glory to you forever!

PRAYER of ADORATION: I lift these hands, dear God, to You, in praise and thanks for all you do. You light the path through all my days and bless me with your loving ways. I lift these hands dear God, to You, in troubled hours when joys are few. You bear me up on eagles' wings and see me through each test life brings. I lift these hands, dear God, to you, please grant me wisdom, patience too. Then fill my heart with love and caring, precious gifts you've made for sharing. AMEN.

Sermon: The Root, The Trunk, and The Branches

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

THIS IS THE WORD OF THE LORD.

This is Trinity Sunday, but people who have Cancer probably do not care. This is Trinity Sunday, but those young couples who cannot get pregnant probably do not care either. "But, this is Trinity Sunday", proclaims the worship committee. Even so, the family dealing with the wayward teenager, the couple headed for a divorce, the person who has lost his job, they do not care. Does it matter too them that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? They just want to know that God is God, and that God somehow knows who they are, where they are, what they are doing, and what they need.

It can be a heady discussion to talk about the Trinity. If you look up the history, it was not an easy doctrine to nail down. There is a ton of mystery that surrounds the person or persons of God. Some people seem entirely clear about it; others are confused, and still others could not care less. A minister at a large church in New York City (2000 members), spent his entire 40 years of preaching without mentioning the Holy Spirit. He was unsure how to explain the Holy Spirit.

The truth is that preaching from a stance of trying to defend the Trinity will make for a tedious sermon and will be like firing a shot over the bow of the people in the congregation's real lives.

Why do we even need a Trinity Sunday? It does not hold a candle to Christmas or Easter or even Pentecost. It does not get a lot of press. There are no super sales on bedding or sheets, or toys or appliances. Maybe that is because it is so confusing, and we really do not know how to talk about it. The great Augustine had to reduce it to a very simple illustration. He used the example of a tree. The root is wood; the trunk is wood; the branches are wood, one substance but three different entities. Okay, so try preaching that! Short sermon. The congregation would love it.

The doctrine of the Trinity was not dreamed up in a theological think tank but was articulated by actual worshipping and serving Christians who, under stress and in the face of questions and challenges, were sweating it out to say with clarity just why they were willing to live a life that looked foolish to others, caring for widows and orphans, suffering persecution, and spilling their own blood – all of it for the wild notion that the Spirit had gathered them into the life of the God, the God who in Christ was making peace with the world. It was a couple of centuries after Matthew wrote his Gospel that the church needed to lay down the planks in this particular Trinitarian bridge. Matthew has only a fragmentary doctrine of the Trinity. Probably about all Matthew knows at this point is that Christians must speak devoutly of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and that such talk did not violate the Jewish insistence upon belief

in the one true God. “You shall have no other Gods before me”. Matthew 28:19 is the only place in the New Testament that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are mentioned together.

Perhaps we can come at it another way. What if there was no Trinity? Jesus told us to go and baptize people in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. What if we baptized people only in the name of the Father? Besides sounding awkward, it would deny the very work and person of Christ and the ongoing activity of the Spirit. It would not be the full picture of who God is.

You would be immersed into the fullness of a very powerful, mysterious, but detached God. That could lead us into mere mysticism.

What if we just baptized people in the name of Jesus? “I baptize you in the name of Jesus. Amen.” That would miss the person of “God the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth,” that part of God that is larger than what we can see or understand and is beyond logic and reason. It would also miss the Holy Spirit, the ongoing presence of God with us today.

What if we said only, “I baptize you in the name of the Holy Spirit”? What is missing there? Missing would be the awesomeness and creativity of God the Father and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, who is God in human flesh. We would miss the part of God who rose from the dead to overcome our sinfulness. Please do not leave that out!

Christian author, Shirley Guthrie writes, “The same God who is God over us as God the Father and Creator, and God with and for us as the incarnate Word and Son, is also God in and among us as God the Holy Spirit.”

You cannot go out into the world, according to Jesus, without all of that. We are immersed, or sprinkled, into the whole being of God, whether we understand it or not.

We are powerless in the world; we are not disconnected from the omnipotent God as Creator, or from the redeeming work of God in human flesh, or from the very presence of that same God in the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us and among us and sometimes outside of us. That is a tremendous gift to celebrate for people who are sitting in the pew feeling detached, isolated, alone, angry, deserted, depressed, grieving, hopeless, fearful, anxious, wounded, ashamed, and tired.

Jesus did not just send the church out to perform the ritual of baptism. The world will not be fixed by merely getting everyone wet. Saying the words “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” is not magic. The more difficult task is that of making Disciples.

Disciples are students. They are like interns. Interns are watching, practicing under supervision, asking questions, making mistakes, and learning from them. Jesus said very clearly, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (v. 19). Go make students of Christ.

Put people in internships, into a lifelong learning process. That is a major paradigm shift from making church members or whatever else we substitute for disciples.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” “Nations” by the way, does not mean “nations” in the modern sense of nation-states, but something more like “foreigners”, tribes of people who are not at all like you,” or to put it succinctly, “Gentiles”. These disciples were Jews, and they knew the scripture. God had promised Abraham that all the tribes of the earth would one day be brought into the family of God, that even the alien gentiles would bow before Israel’s God (Gen 12:1-3); but like a lot of things in the Bible, this was a truth easier to swallow when it was a nice thought in the prayer book, rather than something you were expected to strap on your boots and get done. Telling this band of confused and disoriented disciples that they were to herd all the people of the earth toward Mount Zion in the name of Jesus would be like standing in front of most congregations today – many of them small and all of them of mixed motives and uncertain convictions – and telling them, “Go into all the world and cure Cancer, clean up the environment, evangelize the unbelievers, and , while your at it “establish world peace”.

That is the point, or close to it. The very fact that the task is utterly impossible throws the disciples completely onto the mercy and strength of God. The work of the church cannot be taken up unless. It is true that “all authority” does not belong to the church or its resources but comes from God’s wild investment of God in Jesus the Son and the willingness of the Son to be present always to the church in the Holy Spirit.

Making students of Christ and immersion into the fullness of God go hand in hand. We cannot make ourselves or anyone else a student or intern of Christ without the work of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is dependent upon what and who Jesus was and is. Christ keeps pointing to the Father. So therein lies the power. It is in the Trinity, the fullness of God, to which we are attached as students. Maybe Trinity Sunday ought to be a bigger deal. It silently sits there on the liturgical calendar, offering us the entire being of God in a relationship that we do not deserve but can celebrate having.

It is a day to celebrate the One to whom we belong, in life and in death, through the gift of our baptisms. It is a day the students pay tribute to the teacher!

CLOSING PRAYER:

O blessed Trinity, in whom we know the maker of all things seen and unseen, the savior of all both near and far; By your Spirit enable us to worship your divine majesty, so that with all the company of heaven we may magnify your glorious name, saying: Holy, Holy, Holy. Glory to you, O Lord most high. AMEN!

BENEDICTION:

So, it is always with the church. We take a fragmentary community, a fragmentary faith, a fragmentary understanding of the Trinitarian God, and we go into the world with everything Jesus has taught us. Either the Lord is with us, and all authority has been given to Christ, or we are indeed pathetic fools.