

Sunday, June 11, 2006  
St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Preacher: Christina Minnich, B.S., M. Div.

### **The Holy Trinity**

P: The Holy Gospel According to St. John the third chapter

C: Glory to you, O Lord.

3:1 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. 3:2 He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." 3:3 Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." 3:4 Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" 3:5 Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. 3:6 What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. 3:7 Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' 3:8 The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." 3:9 Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" 3:10 Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? 3:11 "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. 3:12 If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? 3:13 No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. 3:14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 3:15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 3:17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

P: The Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to you, O Christ.

Today's Sermon:



Grace to you and peace in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

Here am I, barely out of seminary and awaiting ordination, and I edited the greeting used by the Apostle Paul in his letters to the various communities he served. Instead of, using Paul's words, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," I took the liberty to insert the Trinitarian Formula. My hope is that by incorporating the words spoken over us in the water of our baptisms – and the making the sign of the cross "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" we would be inspired as we try to understand this particular mystery of God, the doctrine of The Holy Trinity.

I should have heeded the warning issued by Martin Luther, "To try to deny the Trinity endangers [our] salvation, to try to comprehend the Trinity endangers [our] sanity." Explaining and understanding the Holy Trinity is anything but easy. One can search the entire Bible and not find the word "Trinity" anywhere in its Holy pages. There is no mention of the "three in one" or "one in three," or "three persons in one essence." It took St. Augustine 15 books and a decade to write about the Trinity and I'm going to try to do this in 15 minutes or less! However, we can find a biblical basis for our Trinitarian doctrine in 28<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. Matthew. In issuing, the Great Commission Jesus uses all three persons when he says, "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" (28:19).

Theodore Jennings, Jr. in his book *Beyond Theism* sheds more light into the darkness. He explains that Trinitarian theology actually provided solutions that kept the early Christians from backsliding into the superstitious ways of polytheism, or worshipping more than one god. At the same time it prevented Jewish monotheism from negating the significance of Christ.

But I need to ask, does such an explanation make it any easier for us to grasp? Despite our faith in the Triune God does it keep us from still worshipping other gods? What are the gods of this world that steal your time, talent and treasure from the One True God? Is it money, success, clothing, a bigger house, a newer car, alcohol, drug addiction to either legal or illegal drugs, pornography or something else?

How do we explain to un-believers, those new to the faith or our Jewish & Muslim friends, that we do not worship more than one god when the proper name Christians use for God involves three names Father, Son, & Holy Spirit. Especially when this is in sharp contrast to the names, they use which are Yahweh or Allah. When you do the math, it seems to make sense. After all we are taught that one + one + one = three.

In order for us to try to understand the mystery of our Trinitarian God, so we might explain it to others we first need to understand who the "major players" are in our church. You know—those who we come to church to worship, honor and praise. Now I am not referring to people whose family has been members the longest, give the most money, dedicate the most of their time, or selflessly share their gifts and talents to enhance our worship space or worship

experience. Don't misunderstand me, these people do indeed deserve our unending thanks and recognition because without them the body of Christ in this place would cease to exist.

Yet I still think we need to readjust our focus and realize that in the eyes of God we (you and I) are merely "minor players" on the field of life. All that we have and all that we are comes from the "major player" God—the Great 3 in One—three persons in one being. We need to readjust our focus and remind ourselves that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are indeed the "**major players**" who inspire and enable each of us "minor players" to serve others and do the good things that are helpful to the church, our neighborhoods and our world.

In ancient times when a writer wanted to add greater emphasis to something, they repeated the word. In our text from Isaiah, the word "holy" is used three times to describe God. "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory" (6:3) Instead of seeing God in this glorified manner we often see God, the Father as something or someone beyond us. We see God the Son being fully human yet fully divine is seen as someone who is or was among us. While God the Holy Spirit is something or someone within us. Can you see how these images limit God?

My question is, "How can we regain some of the awe of the God experienced by Isaiah in his vision? Perhaps to see the magnitude and majesty of God we need to multiply God's power and love by taking one x one x one which equals (=) One Awesome God! This is how Isaiah saw God. Realizing his unworthiness and finding himself in the presence of God Isaiah feared for his life! Except for a hot coal to his lips, God was merciful and forgave his sins. The result, Isaiah felt his guilt depart. Subsequently, his response to God's voice saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" was, "Here am I; send me!" (6:8). In his weakness, Isaiah was made strong. His joy and gratitude were so great he was compelled to answer God's call. "Here am I; send me!" (6:8).

What will it take for us to reawaken to the fact that we have one Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal who not only forgives our sins but calls each of us into service to others? The task Isaiah was given was not an easy one. He had to tell God's chosen people that they were sinful and needed to repent. The things God calls each of us to do are not always easy or pleasant.

When Nicodemus encounters Jesus, he thinks he is being told to do something impossible. Whoever heard of being born again from his mother's womb? Jesus however, stresses **our need** to be born again not from the flesh but from the Spirit, from "above" and from the water and the Spirit. God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit want us to step out in faith and understand that baptism is an act of the Triune God. It is God who transforms us in the water of our baptism and God who enables us to live out our baptism through daily dying to our sinful selves and rising to new life through repentance.

Look at how Nicodemus initially steps out. Even though he comes alone under the cover of night, he speaks "knowingly" and on behalf of others as he attests to the miracles performed by Jesus. He doesn't say, "Rabbi, **I know** that you are a teacher who has come from God." He says, "Rabbi, **we know** that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these

signs that you do apart from the presence of God" (John 3.2). Nicodemus knew because he and his cronies saw the miracles Jesus performed with their own eyes. This was not the type of knowing Jesus was after. He wanted knowing based on faith. So I ask, what can we say that we know? Do we speak out for others – the marginalized, the poor, the homeless, the abused?

Through his teaching, Jesus imparts more than knowledge. He also imparts values. Kingdom values that we are called to practice now in this earthly kingdom. Jesus reveals some of these values as he also speaks for others in verse 11 when he says, "Very truly, I tell you, **we speak** of what **we know** and **testify** to what **we have seen**" (John 3:11a). Jesus uses words of action and of witness. These are words of discipleship, those willing to say "Here am I, send me." Something to which each of us are all called to do in our baptism. Yes, we too are to be able to share: what we know, what we see, by the way we speak and by the way, we testify.

Values are caught more than they are taught. The idiom parents often use — do as I say not as I do – just doesn't happen. Children "do" what they observe. If they observe their parents and others acting differently outside of the church than inside the church what message does that give them?

In his book *Power Surge, Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* Michael Foss notes that practicing such discipleship should include: daily prayer, weekly worship, Bible reading, service, spiritual friendships, and giving. How many of us are following this path? Pastor Brian Stoffregen from Marysville, California adds that we should be invitational going so far as to say, "that if we don't believe what we believe strongly enough to invite others into it, then I wonder how strongly we really believe it."

God is always working on our behalf in a threefold way. The Trinity is about the love of God and relationship with God and in community with others. My question is, do we believe strongly enough to say, "Here I am, send me?" I know it's scary out there but I am confident that if you continue to work together as a community of faith offering one another support through godly friendships and caring relationships God will grow the church.

This is a very caring and giving congregation. Something I have experienced first hand and to which I can and will attest. I will always hold you close in prayer and ask that you continue to keep me in yours as I answer God's call to ministry of Word and Sacrament but I encourage you to also answer God's call on your life and say "Here I am, send me" in whatever way you can. Amen.