

Holy Trinity B 26 May 2024  
John 3:1-17  
St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth  
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Grace and peace to you, beloved of God, from the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Let's pray: ...

Holy Trinity Sunday is all about the triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for our salvation. It's not about straining our brains trying to figure out how there can be one God in Three Persons and at the same time Three Persons and only one God. You can try, but you'll fry your brain. Rather, today is the day to simply receive the saving truth of the Trinity and to rejoice in the reality of the triune God. Today is the day to rejoice in the loving Father, the lifted-up Son, and the life-giving Holy Spirit.

First, let's rejoice in the loving Father as we hear these familiar and much-loved verses: '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. 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' (John 3:16,17).

Does anything jump out at you here? God isn't out to get us; he wants to save us... at any cost. He gives us his utmost. He gives us his dearest treasure.

"For God so loved." This is in his very nature. God is love, at the core of his being (1 John 4:8). He has a Father's heart toward us. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Psalm 145:8). As a good father shows compassion toward his children, so the Lord shows compassion toward us.

And what's so incredible, so amazing about the Father's love, is the object of his love - the world. "For God so loved the world." It's incredible because the world has turned its back on its Creator. In rebellion and hostility and anger, we human beings have pathetically shaken our fist at God, as though we know what's better for us than he who created us. It's simply idiotic to think that we're better off independent of and separated from our Creator. How ridiculous can we get? And yet, God still loves us unconditionally.

"For God so loved the world." How much? To the extent "that he gave his only Son." Think of what the Father said at Jesus' baptism: 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased' (Mark 1:11). Think of how the Father repeated those same words at Jesus' transfiguration: 'This is my Son, the Beloved' (Mark 9:7). The love of the heavenly Father for his Son is incomprehensible to us. Yet, out of the Father's great sacrificial love for us sinners, was willing to send his Son into this world, giving him up for us. "He [who] did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us" (Romans 8:32).

And for what purpose? "That everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." That's God's good purpose for us: not that we should be eternally lost; rather, that we should be saved and have eternal life. That we may live the way we were designed to live, in fellowship with him, blessed and loved by him. God desires that we give up on self and trust instead in Christ, that we may gain eternal life. Which is a nice segue into the Second Person of the Trinity, God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Here, we'll focus on these words about Jesus: 'And just 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' (John 3:14,15).

And that's exactly what happened. Jesus was lifted up, on a cross, bearing our sins in his sinless body, the holy Son of God shedding his innocent blood on our behalf, for our forgiveness. Because Jesus is the Son of God, who came down from heaven in the flesh, both true God and true man, his death is sufficient to cover all of the sins of all of the sinners who have ever lived, and ever will live, including you; including me.

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

The lifted-up Son! Lifted up on the cross, making peace between heaven and earth, making peace between God and man, reconciling us with God! This is the heart and core of our salvation: Christ lifted up on the cross. There’s no salvation apart from this great and monumental act of God in the atonement, accomplished by Christ on the cross. The lifted-up Son. Look to him and live!

But how do we know Christ? How do we believe in him? How did we first come to faith in our Saviour and believe and be saved? The Third Person of the Trinity. The person and work of the Holy Spirit, who brings us to faith and gives us new birth and new life as children of God is the how and the Who. Jesus speaks of the life-giving Spirit when he responds to Nicodemus: ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, “You must be born from above.” 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’ (John 3:5-8).

“Born of the Spirit.” “Born of water and the Spirit.” You and I were given new birth when we were baptised. Before baptism, we were merely born of the flesh, children of Adam, natural-born sinners, outside of the kingdom of heaven, condemned to eternal darkness. In baptism, God makes us his children, washing away our sins, connecting us to Christ, and giving us the gift of the Spirit, who brings us to faith and keeps us in the faith. Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again in order to see that which he desires; the kingdom of heaven. In baptism, we’re born again in the Spirit and we’re given new life.

In the Nicene Creed we call the Holy Spirit, “the Lord, the giver of life.” The Spirit brings us from death to life through the mighty Word of God. Through Word and Sacrament, the Spirit does his work, giving us life and renewing our lives constantly along the way. St Paul writes to Titus about this life-giving, life-renewing work of the Spirit, and as I read it, I want you to hear how all Three Persons of the Trinity are involved in saving us:

“But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Saviour appeared [Father], he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit [Holy Spirit]. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour [Son], so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4-7).

Just as we find in John 3, St Paul praises the work of all Three Persons of the Trinity; active and working in perfect harmony and unity to achieve our salvation.

Dear friends, that’s what the Festival of the Holy Trinity is all about: rejoicing in the triune God who saves us, the God in whose name we’re baptised. Trinity Sunday is a wonderful celebration of our identity and the salvation we enjoy in the name of the loving Father, the lifted-up Son, and the life-giving Spirit. Amen.

And the peace of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, will keep your hearts and your minds safe in Christ Jesus, the Beloved. Amen.