

Knowing The Trinity Through Baptism

Matthew 28:16-20

Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri

June 11, 2017 – Holy Trinity Sunday



In the name of the Father, and of † the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. I think it's safe to say that this morning's Gospel – known by many as the so-called *Great Commission* – is one of the most well-known passages in all of Holy Scripture. Here we find Jesus and His disciples on a mountain near Galilee as He was preparing to ascend back to the right hand of the Father. The place where this event happened is especially interesting because throughout the Bible mountains are often portrayed as points of contact between God and His people. For instance, God first came to Moses in the burning bush on Mount Horeb. Later He gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. In the New Testament, the Sermon on the Mount stands out as another example – as do the Mountains where Jesus was transfigured, crucified, and of course ascended. In each of these, a mountain was where God revealed Himself to man. And in every case, the God who revealed Himself is the Triune God.

In the beginning the Father was at work speaking our world into existence while the Spirit was at work hovering over the face of the deep. And with them both was the Son, who – as St. John reminds us – was “with God, and *was* God,” the One through whom “all things were made.” Because God is Triune, when He created man, He spoke, saying: “Let *Us* make man in *Our* image.” The Holy Trinity, you see, *is* the essential reality of who God is and what He has done. And although it's impossible to entirely comprehend this, we must still believe it. It is the Father who – filled with Fatherly, Divine goodness – made all things and still preserves them, loved the world, had mercy on us poor sinners, and sent His only Son to die in our place. It is the Son who – out of love for His Father, you, me and all people – came down from heaven, was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, was made Man, crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered, died and was buried. And because we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him, the Holy Spirit joins us to the Son, makes us God's children, and bestows on us the blessings of the cross: forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life.

To be sure, the mystery of the Trinity is impossible to understand. Indeed it is a true mystery – a mystery which, if you try too hard to comprehend it – will set your head to spinning. Perhaps that's why we're much more comfortable talking only about Jesus. But isn't that how it ought to be? There is no way you can ever

know the One True God except through Jesus in whom God's plan of salvation is revealed. In Christ, even the smallest child can understand the mystery of the Trinity as well or better than even the greatest theologian. Jesus Christ comes to you in ways you can understand. He speaks to you on your level – bridging the gap between God and man by the perfect life He lived for us all, and the death He died in our place. In a sense, Christ is the “Mountain” of God – the Place where God and Man perfectly come together – the Place where you must go to hear the Words of eternal life.

And just as Jesus once designated that mountain where He would meet His disciples to depart back to His rightful place in heaven, He likewise has shown you the “mountain” on which you must meet Him. He has given you His Word through the Prophets and the Apostles. He has attached that Word and Promise to the Sacraments. And He administers these gifts to you by means of pastors through the power of His Holy Spirit. These men who are sent by Jesus to shepherd His sheep are how you hear the Words of Jesus. Through this ministry the Holy Spirit is at work reconciling you to God and uniting you with Christ – so that connected with Him, you come to know God as He really is – Triune.

Nowhere is this more true than in Holy Baptism – that “mountain” where you first encountered our Triune God. Concerning the Baptism of Christ, Luther writes: “Do you think it was a joke that the heavens were opened with the voice of God the Father declaring Christ to be His beloved Son, and with the Holy Spirit coming down upon Him as a dove?” Luther wrote these words to impress upon us that our knowledge of the Trinity was given in Baptism through our Savior, for you first encountered our Triune God in Holy Baptism, and it's there at the Font where the Holy Spirit first united you with Christ.

In Baptism, God became your Father, and you were made to be His child. God gave you His Holy Spirit, who brought with Him Christ and all His benefits. And all this took place because – as Luther points out – “the Baptism of Christ sanctified the Jordan and all water to be a rich, full washing away of sins, and a gracious water of salvation. His Baptism became your Baptism. He entered the water for you, and you have now entered the water with Him.” Holy Baptism is where that “Great Exchange” began – where Christ went down into the water holy and righteous, but came out covered with your sin. At the same time you went into the water cor-

rupted by sin, yet emerged dripping wet with the righteousness of Christ.

Buried and raised with Christ in Baptism, God gives you His Name, and you become His child. Now, because you bear in your own body the name of our Holy Triune God, as you go about your day – no matter where that day might take you – you carry within you a living portrait of the Trinity. For you, as a Baptized child of God, the Father Son and Holy Spirit aren't some abstract concept. They are the very roots of your family tree! That's why, in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus tenderly invites you to address God as your "Father." You come to Him in prayer just as little children come to their dear father – because you are His children. And as such, you pray that this Name given you in Baptism might be hallowed among us. And God's Name is hallowed whenever and wherever His Word is taught in its truth and purity, when you, as the children of God, live in harmony with it, and then, as you go on your way, teach others to receive and believe all the things Jesus has given you.

And all this comes into proper focus every time we gather in His presence for worship. In fact, the only suitable response to a proper knowledge of the Holy Triune God is Worship. But what does "worship" mean? No doubt, you could find any number of answers to that question. But the highest worship of all is not that *you* do something for God, but rather that *you* receive everything *from Him* by faith. To worship God is to acknowledge Him as the only true God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the Maker of heaven and earth – the Redeemer of all mankind through the blood of Christ – and the Sanctifier of the Church by Word and Sacrament. To worship God is to fear, love and trust in Him above all things – to rely on Him completely – literally, to place your life into His hands. Such worship begins with Baptism, and continues whenever you come to hear the Word of God or to receive Christ's body and blood in the Supper.

Yet, instead of worship, far too often we're plagued by doubts. You know all the doubts you daily have to face in your own life. Perhaps a loved one has died and you wonder if God really cares. Maybe money is tight, bills are coming due, and you wonder how you're going to make ends meet. When every time you turn on the news you watch in horror as another act of terror unfolds it's hard to believe God really cares. All of us have such doubts. Even on the mountain where this morning's Gospel took place, Matthew records the fact that the disciples doubted. And of course, who can forget the account of Thomas, where he refused to believe Christ had risen from the grave until he had felt for himself the wounds of His crucifixion and death?

It may well be that doubt is the most frustrating thing a Christian can experience – because doubt is the very opposite of faith and worship. It's the lingering well-spring of sin that remains with you throughout your life. Remember how Satan tricked Eve by planting doubt in her mind? That's what he does to you as well. And that is precisely why you must daily return to your Baptism and to your life with God in Christ. That's why you must cling for dear life to the Word and Sacraments – in which, and through which, Christ has promised to be ever present with you. Indeed, that day when He left this earth bodily to ascend to the Father, He promised His disciples: "Lo, I am with you always!" And He is. Whenever you confess your sins, you're returning to the water of Holy Baptism. You're drowning the Old Adam with all his sinful thoughts and desires and allowing the New Man – Christ Himself – to rise up again in your heart. Likewise, whenever you come to the Supper of Christ's body and blood you're returning to the reality of your Baptism and participating in the death and Resurrection of our Lord.

One of the Early Church Fathers put it quite nicely. He said: "Like little fishes we are born in the water. And as fish, we live our whole life in the water of our Baptism." That was certainly the case for Dr. Luther. The answer to his frequent doubts – and also the assaults of the devil – was a simple assertion of faith. He said: "I am Baptized. Because God has called me to be His own dear child, He will never leave nor forsake me. I was buried with Christ in His death, and I am raised in His Resurrection. I am covered by His blood. I am Baptized!" By the grace of God, dear Christian, that must also be your confession. By your Baptism, you became a child of God so that the Father even sets a Table at which you may now feast upon His own dear Son. Once He was given unto death for the salvation of the world. Now He is given to you under bread and wine for the forgiveness of your sins. By the Holy Spirit, you cling to that body and blood of Christ in true faith – and in it you receive His forgiveness, life and salvation.

God has given you the grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith. By means of His blessed Word and Holy Sacraments, God's promise is that He will keep you steadfast in this one true faith and worship until life's end – even as He will also defend you from all your enemies! *This* is God's pledge and promise to you – and He *will* continue to deliver on that promise for the sake of His dear Son until that Day when Christ returns to usher us all into His heavenly kingdom. Amen.

And now the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God the Father, and the fellowship of His Holy Spirit will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.