

Sermon Holy Trinity 2019

June 16, 2019

John 8:48-59

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord, and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read.

This week as I was meditating on preaching today, I was thinking about it being Holy Trinity Sunday. In light of that, I was preparing to talk about the uniqueness of our God in our multicultural context; about how we have to understand that our God, the Triune God is the One True God. In our day and place where God is God whether He's Allah, or she's Gaia, or it's the Great Spirit, how we have to know that this isn't all the same. So I was all ready to dig into the prep for that. Then I read the readings. As a pastor it's always good to read the Bible before you preach. Since that's where the Holy Spirit promises to work, it's helpful to assure that He'll be working in my preaching, protecting you from my sinful tendencies. So I started by reading these readings. And look at them. Do you see the emphasis in them? What do they point to? They point to Jesus. Not just Jesus, but Jesus as God in the flesh. Want proof? Listen to those words there. From the Psalm: **“what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet.”** In the reading from Proverbs: **“The Lord possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.”** In Acts: **“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.... Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”** And most clearly from the Gospel: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”**

Now, I know I've mentioned this before but that last passage is very dear to my heart. In fact Trinity Sunday is very dear to my heart. If you've ever seriously wrestled with the Trinity, seriously wrestled with Jesus being God, you can relate. See for me it was when I was in college, at Indiana. I had come to the point where I had determined to leave Roman Catholicism. In view of such a monumental shift, I think I determined that I should seek to be as much of what's called a tabula rasa—a blank slate—as

possible. So I stripped down all that I knew. I wanted to try to come to Scripture as unencumbered by my baggage as possible. This went so far as even questioning the Trinity. Now that line of questioning in particular was motivated by some friends of a friend who belonged to a cult called “The Way International.” What they believed was that Jesus isn’t really God. Sure they believed He was special, that He had died for our sins, but He wasn’t actually fully God—of the same substance of the Father—as we say in the Creed. Being in this position I was in, I listened. And they would pose questions. “How could this be or that be?” “Why is Jesus always called Son of Man?” “Why does He tell Mary not to worship Him?” Or as the argument got deeper: “don’t look at this passage, look at this passage. Don’t look at John at all.” Etc.

I had a point where I was teetering. What was amazing though is that every time I was about to tip, God put a passage in front of me tipping me back. For example, I was questioning and that Sunday the appointed Epistle lesson was 1 Tim 3:16 **“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”** And you know what some manuscripts say there? Not “He” was manifested in the flesh, but God. God was manifested in the flesh. Then there was the name Immanuel: God with us. And finally this. **“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”** Now I think you’ve probably heard why this is so important, but in case you haven’t, it’s worth repeating. If you notice, Jesus doesn’t just say before Abraham was I was—that would have been enough. In fact, I just thought “I am” was a way of saying that Jesus was before Abraham, and that was a strong argument for me. But what convinced me was when I learned the significance of I AM. That when Moses went up on the mount and was confronted by God in the Burning Bush: “Moses Go rescue my people!” Moses says, “OK, but who should I tell them sent me?” “I am who I am, tell them I AM sent you.” Tell them I AM sent you. Before Abraham was I Am. And that’s what did it. But in view of that, that still being fresh in my mind, I still remember my first Trinity Sunday as Lutheran. I ate it up. We stood up and in place of the usual Nicene Creed, we confessed this tome named the Athanasian Creed. And it was long. But I loved it. Where was that when I was doing all this questioning?! I didn’t know about Athanasius, I knew about Arius, but I didn’t know about Athanasius, or the Councils besides Nicea, or how much there had been wrestling with this, and how in that wrestling came this Creed. What a gift, Christians!

What a gift handed down to us. You see I hadn’t been the first to struggle with this. I think you all have likely heard of Arius, but he had been spreading this idea that Jesus wasn’t God in the flesh. He wasn’t of the same substance of the Father, but of a

like substance. In the Greek not homoousious, but homoiousious. And the Holy Spirit prevailed and led the Church to confess that Jesus is that same substance of the Father as God. Not the same person, but sharing the One Divine Substance—however that works. That was 325, then in 451, the Council of Chalcedon, where they hashed this out. This person Jesus, one man, two Natures. Those natures, unconfused, unchangeable, indivisible, inseparable. That is they're always two natures, not something melted together. They don't change, they're different and shouldn't be confused with each other. They're indivisible, they're inseparable, you can't divide Jesus. Sometimes you can see what He does as God and what He does as man, but it's always the whole Christ doing this, one person. In fact, that's why He can come to us in the Lord's Supper, because the divine and human are joined so closely that the humanity can be wherever the divinity is. You can't separate them. But humanity is still humanity and divinity is still divinity.

All of this hashed out for us, and what a gift?! Why? Why is this such a gift? What's it matter? Because no other God did this. Because if you don't acknowledge the Son you don't have life. Because your sin is so deep that you have to have God come and dig you out of it. It can't just be a man. It can't just be Joe Schmo. It's got to be Jesus of Nazareth. It's got to be Immanuel. It's got to be the God-man, the One who is totally human like us, body and soul, like we'll say in the Athanasian Creed, but totally God as well. If it's not this union, it's insufficient. If He's just God He can't redeem your humanity. If it's just humanity, it's not sufficient for anything but one life. It's got to be both in one person. That's why it matters.

It also matters as I've been making this point about creation since Easter, about how God works in and through creation. About how He created and He loves creation. About how He entered into this creation to redeem creation, and so eternity will be a physical creation. You see, Arius couldn't have handled that. Now I say that as though I've read his works. I haven't. I don't think we have them anymore for me even to be able to. But if Arius agreed with me on this, it would have been inconsistent. This view of God that would prevent Jesus from being of the same substance with the Father, that would have been one where He can't touch this world like He does in Jesus. Can't come to you and carry you like He does. Can't meet you in the waters of baptism, joining Himself to you, dwelling in you. Feeding you with body and blood. Can't do it. But that's the beauty of this, that's what He does. For Arius, God would have to be so separate from the world, this couldn't happen. But what a joy that it has happened. What a joy that when you're suffering you know that Jesus has entered into this suffering with you, even for you. What a joy that you know this because He still comes

to you in His body and blood in the supper. What a joy that when the world tells you they can't believe in a God who allows the terrible things that we see in the world, you can know that this God came into the world to experience that and worse first hand in His life, atoning death, and perfect resurrection. What a joy that you can know that He still promises to come again and bring a new world where it's all gone and He will wipe away the tears from everyone there in that Kingdom. What a joy.

Now as I say all of this, I made the point that this is all about Jesus. In fact, I was visiting a shut in this week who sort of called me on that: "Pastor, we talk so much about Jesus, it seems like the Father gets shortchanged." But you see that's the importance of this too. Look at what Jesus says, **"If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me."** The Father brings this glory to the Son, that we would look at Him. And why? Because it's in the Son that we know the Father. John says in His first letter, **"No one who denies the Son has the Father."** And after this reading in the Gospel of John, Jesus tells Philip: **"Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works."**

And so hopefully you see it. We're focusing on the Divinity of the Christ in these readings, but as we look at Jesus, as we look at the Son, we see the Father. In fact, to make this Trinitarian for Holy Trinity Sunday, as the Spirit speaks to us through the Word, as He gives us ears to hear that Word, and faith to trust it. As He works in us, He reveals the Son to us. And as we see the Son, we see the Father. Spirit reveals Son, Son reveals Father. And what we see is the Father's heart for us, that He would love us to send the Son, that He would love us to provide for our every need of body and soul. And that He would send the Spirit that we would know this. And this is what we see in the Son: that love of the God who came into this world, to bear your sin, to be your savior, to die for it that you would live. And to live for you that you would never die. As Luther says in "A Mighty Fortress:" "Ask ye Who is this? Jesus Christ it is, of Sabaoth Lord, And there's none other God. He holds the field forever." Yes He holds the field of battle Christian, and He holds it for you that you would know Him and His love; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen