

Trinity Sunday 2010  
Sermon delivered 5-30-10  
Immanuel Lutheran Church  
Neal Collins, Pastor

### ***John 16:12–15***

*"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.  
<sup>13</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup>He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. <sup>15</sup>All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."*

### **Trinity Sunday**

Today is Trinity Sunday. The one day of the church year we focus on the church teachings and not on the teachings of Jesus. Trinity Sunday is a day the church traditionally recites the Athanasian Creed. Fortunately, after the Pastors Bible Class last Monday we won't be reciting it because those who put the cranberry hymnal together either forgot it, or omitted it. Trinity is a Sunday to have a supply pastor in place or call in sick. The temptations of this Sunday in dealing with the Trinity, the Father, +Son, and Holy Spirit and their relationship to each other seems to take the extremes of reducing God to a mystery, a formula of water being liquid, steam, or ice, or knowing the exact nature of God. The question I ask in preparation for this Sunday morning is, what does this mean for your life, and what difference does it make in your life?

### **Putting God into Words**

Robert Fulghum, a former Unitarian minister and the author of *Everything I needed to learn I learned in Kindergarten*, quoted someone as saying "Arguing whether or not God exists is like fleas arguing whether a dog exists. Arguing over the correct name of God is like fleas arguing over the name of a dog. And arguing over whose notion of God is correct is like fleas arguing over who owns the dog." This is the spirit we need to enter into Trinity Sunday. When you take your experience of God and put them into words, you are doing theology. Each of you have a core of your sense of God. Some of it may be based on Holy Scripture, and some it based on your experience, or both.

This morning we are going to the core. We open most worship services with the words "The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. The response is: and also with you. We close the service with The Father, +Son, and Holy Spirit. These are the bookends of all that happens in this sacred space on Sunday mornings.

Let us be mindful of the fact that the words naming the God in whose name we gather are more than the struggle, dogma, or doctrine from which the name emerged. The core of all of this is describing and defining this love of God, who acted in this Jesus, to restore our broken world and lives, and continues to act in through the Spirit.

## **God in the Center**

What does this mean for our lives? The Enlightenment pushed God to the edge. Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am". We moved God out of the center. Moved from, "What does God think of us?" to "What do we think of God?" There are many images, metaphor, picture, descriptions and theologies. Some put the emphasis on God the Father, Creator, Supreme Being, Distant, Aloof, with the Son and the Spirit being lackey's. Others, like the Evangelicals, see Jesus as all of God in a human dimension. But there is more. Some see the emphasis not on God the creator, the Son, but on the Spirit, reducing God to sum of not what I think, but simply my experiences.

## **The Creeds**

The church, the Lutheran Church, recognizes three creeds. The Apostles, Nicene, and Athanasian Creed. The Apostles Creed was not written by the Apostles. but named after the 12 Apostles, and is to be said when a baptism is performed. We speak of the Trinity, the Father,+Son, and Holy Spirit. The importance of this creed is seeing our story as being a part of the God story. Someone recently made the point of saying we are baptized *into* the Father, +Son, and Holy Spirit, as opposed to just *in*. God enters into our lives and we enter into the Trinity.

Historically, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Alexander the Great conquered the Western World and Greek was the predominant language. The Bible was written in Greek. When the Greeks fell, the Roman Empire emerged. So Tertullian translated the Bible from Greek to Latin around 200 AD. He gave new insights and interpretations along with this translation, and influenced the dogma of the Church. In his theology, a like word Trinity is not in Holy Scripture. He used it to describe the persona of God, the person of God in Father, +Son, and Holy Spirit. He shaped the liturgy of the Eucharist with terms like *sacramentum*, meaning Christ is mysteriously present in the bread and wine. He defined the relationship of the Godhead as being of one substance.

## **Differences of Opinion**

Now we move from the year 200 AD to 325 AD when Constantine was the Emperor of Rome and converted the empire to Christianity. Everything is being consolidated. There was difference of opinion regarding Jesus. The company line that came from Tertullian was represented by Athanasius. He maintained the God who created the heavens and the earth became fully human in Jesus. Arius and his followers challenged this theology. They couldn't accept the theology of Jesus being God. God is self contained, holy, aloof, detached, and for him to get crucified made him like a god from the Greek pantheon who ate and drank with mortals. They saw God as transcendent, exalted, and distant. Jesus was an exceptional human being in whom God acted, a good model to follow. They did not see Jesus as being of one substance with the Father, or connected with the Father, before the foundation of the world.

## **Nicene Creed**

The debate ended with what we call the Nicene Creed from the Council of Nicaea, with the words "We believe in One God the Father Almighty, creator of Heaven and Earth...and in One Lord Jesus Christ the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father...". The Athanasian Creed came 300 years later, arguing

the Holy Spirit was co-equal with the Godhead of the Father and the Son. This caused a split between the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. The Eastern Church does not recognize the God who is present in Jesus as being fully present in the Holy Spirit.

### **What Difference Does it Make?**

Now, the key question you must ask is “What does all this have to do with my life as a Christian in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? So what? What difference does it make? If it doesn’t make any difference then I have wasted 20 hours of my week and 20 minutes of your life. After prayer, reflection, and study, I am convinced most Christians today subscribe to the Trinity. This appears evident in scripture from Paul’s writings in Corinthians 12 of be the same Spirit, Lord, and God to Ephesians one faith, Father, and baptism to John’s Gospel of the Father and the Son, making their home in you with the Spirit to our Gospel this morning when the Spirit of Truth comes from the Father.

Now having said that, I also observe most Christians seem to live Arian lives, as if God is detached, transcendent, removed from our every day lives. The Trinity implies a certain dependency and relationship of the Father to the Son and to the Spirit. We place a premium on our sense of independence and freedom. I suspect we are more comfortable with distance than intimacy. The Trinity implies intimacy, love, connectedness, belonging, sacrificing, and all those things that seem too close for comfort for most of us.

This is more than a theological issue. The application of the Arian thinking probably is easier for us to follow than the Trinitarian model of life. We probably like having our space, being observers instead of participants, we like self-sufficiency over self-denial, self focused over self sacrifice. There is nothing wrong with the sufficiency, focus, but lacking community, intimacy, and love. Looking at the two models, the Trinitarian model invites us to live in community and connectedness as the Father, +Son, and Holy Spirit are connected with each other and explore the Arian nature of our life style in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **God’s Story = Our Story**

Every week when we say the creed we are invited again to see the God’s story as our story by participating in the circle and the dance of the Trinity, and being communal by inviting you to dance in God’s love with others. We can move beyond the Divine Mathematics of 3 being 1 and 1 being 3. We can move beyond the Arian/Athanasius controversy of the Son being equal to the Father, or of one substance with the Father. We can move beyond God being One without the Son and the Spirit. We are invited to join the dance of the Trinity, or just stand on the sidelines and dance alone. The Gospels invite you to see the intimacy and the desire of God to makes his home in you,m and for you to be in the home of God.