

Sermon Monologue

Good morning! It is really good to be back with you this morning. It has seemed like forever since we were last here. You know, I usually do a lot of research in preparation for a sermon, most of which I do not use. It does, however, give me a lot of trivia to talk about. For example, a Roman catholic priest told me that he was taught that there were twelve fruits of the spirit rather than nine in Galatians 4:22. I told him that I knew why. It was because St. Jerome added "continence, and celibacy and one other. Carolyn Stout asked me this morning "Why are church doors painted red." I told her that I knew. Bishop Rockwell said that it was because red doors on churches in the Middle Ages constituted a designation of a sanctuary. A second reason is because they designate saints. who were martyred. Well, those may or may not have been the reasons. Many things are just plain mysteries. When my youngest granddaughter was two, she was running around the house saying, "That is a mystery!" I said to her, "What is a mystery, Erica?" She replied, "Something you do not understand." Well, folks, I am going to tell you about a mystery this morning.

Trinity Sunday-2009

Greeting in the name of the Holy Trinity of God! Today, we celebrate Trinity Sunday which was first declared by St. Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury at his consecration on the Sunday After Pentecost in year A. D. 1162. It commemorates the belief that we worship one God in unity of substance and Trinity of persons as God relates to his world. The Godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one; the Glory co-equal, the mystery co-eternal.

If you want an example to hold on to in trying to understanding the mystery of the Holy Trinity, think of the chemical substance of two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen (H₂O). It is one substance that can appear in three forms-a solid, ice, a liquid, water and a gas, steam. All three examples have a different form but are of the same substance-two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen. And, you can change any of the forms into another without changing the chemical substance. But you know, even that is a mystery. (Name others!)

The doctrine of the Trinity is found implicitly in Holy Scriptures, but explicitly in the early Christian writings-in the three men of Genesis 18, the threefold Sanctus of Isaiah 6 in today's lesson, in baptismal formulae of the new Testament, in the works of the Apostolic Fathers and in the first four ecumenical councils of the Early church.

The word Trinity (Trias) was said to be first used by Theophilus of Antioch around A.D. 180. Basically, the doctrine of the Trinity is a mystery that is above reason but not contrary to reason. Well meaning men/women of faith have and continue to differ theologically over it. But through it all, I believe that each is honestly trying to recognize and honor the God who relates to us as creator, redeemer and sanctifier.

I. Isaiah Encounters God the Father in Isaiah 6:1-8

Isaiah encountered the Trinity of God the Creator in a vision. Being young, humble and with a sense of unworthiness, he cowered at the magnificent presence of Almighty God. He saw God sitting on a high and lofty throne. His royal robe with its flowing train filled the temple. God's radiance was so brilliant that the attending Seraphs had to cover their faces as they flew to and fro, singing "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole world is full of his glory.*" There was an atmosphere of mist, and thunder and smoke. Isaiah, of course, was terrified.

In God's presence, Isaiah responded as every human, no doubt, would respond in God's presence-with fear and trembling, confession and awe. One of the Seraphs presently took a live coal of fire from the altar and touched Isaiah's lips, proclaiming, "*Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.*" Isaiah 6: 7. Then God's purpose for Isaiah was revealed. It was a call to go forth and proclaim the saving news to a people desperately in need of God's salvation.

In this passage, we encounter God in the Person of the Creator, choosing a prophet to call a wayward Israel back to the covenant relationship that he had sealed with them through their forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

II. Nicodemus Comes Face to face with God the Son in John 3:1-17

Nicodemus encountered God as Redeemer, Savior and Son in a nocturnal meeting of the two. In John 3, we find Nicodemus, a powerful member of the Sanhedrin council, approaching Jesus by night. Why by night, you may ask? Perhaps he does not want to be seen by the other rulers or maybe he wanted some uninterrupted one-on-one time with this new, strange teacher of the Law. After all, night was a Pharisee's time to study the minutia of the law. The conversation goes on like so many of the dialogues in John's gospel. A question is asked or a statement is made. Jesus answered with a puzzling example. Another question is posited, then an even more esoteric answer was given. Finally, the conversation drifts off into a dissertation on some principle of faith.

Nicodemus said, "*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 6:2. Now, who are the "we" that Nicodemus is talking about? Certainly, it is not most of the other 69 members of the Sanhedrin. Sooner or later, they will seek to discredit and to kill Jesus for his teachings. I think that the Evangelist always talked with his community in mind.

Jesus looked into the heart of Nicodemus and went straight to the point. He knew that this man, who will later help Joseph of Arimathea entomb his body, was a sincere seeker. Nicodemus was asking for something that he was missing in his life despite all that he knew about Scribal Law. Jesus said, "*Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above.*" Could he be talking about a physical re-birth? Absolutely not! Jesus told him that this type of birth must come through water and the Spirit. Here, in the words of Jesus, John is also reminding his community and us that the new relationship is not a matter of physical rebirth. The initiation of Baptism with water and the Holy Spirit constitute the born-again experience. However, it is not something that we can initiate or control. God gives us his Spirit to help us do what we by our human weakness cannot do-

respond to him in obedience and love.

Unlike the rulers of the law who tried to win God's favor by their defining and practice of the minutia of the Law, the Holy Spirit is God-given, God-focused and God-controlled. Jesus expressed shock that a teacher of the law like Nicodemus did not know that.

Now, the conversation drifts into the dissertation. *"Verily truly, if I tell you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things?"* John 3: 12. The "you" here is addressed to John's community and to us today as well.

Jesus went further. Only the one who descended from heaven can understand the things of the Father. That one now stood there in front of Nicodemus to attest to that fact. Salvation and eternal life or a proper relationship with God is available only through God's love in the self-sacrifice of his Son on Calvary. And know this, no one, no keeping of the law or rules and regulations can merit that relationship and that quality of life! Rather, it is God's gift to us because of his love for us.

As Nicodemus completely faded out of the picture, the passage ended with the essential message for today and for all time. God's intention is not to punish us for what we can not keep by our own nature and power. It is for salvation. For it is out of love that he created us. It is out of Love that God sent his Son to redeem us. And it is out of love, knowing our weaknesses, that he sent and sends his Holy Spirit to sustain and sanctify us.

Now you may ask, "Who is the 'us'?" And the answer is, the "us" is contained in what I believe to be the greatest statement in the whole Bible: *"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."* John 3:16. God's focus is not on a certain denomination, religion, sect or group of people. God's focus is on the whole world. Thus, God became one of us to show us the way back to God. Thus, in this passage, we encounter the Godhead in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ of Nazareth-the Second Person of the Trinity.

III. Paul Tell Us Of The Woking of The Holy Ghost in Romans 8:12-17

Finally, in Romans 8, we come face to face with the Third Person of the Trinity. Paul like John, calls us to be debtors to the Spirit of God and not to the world that is alienated from God or to our lower natures. Those who live according to their lower nature will die. You and I are aware of this kind of death by observing the self destruction we see all around us in broken homes, warring nations and crushed lives. It is only the Spirit of God-God's gift given to us fully at Pentecost and through our Baptism-that the destructive deeds of our lower nature and the evil that is in the world can be kept in check or put to death. It is that Spirit that makes us adopted children of God. It is that Spirit that gives us abundant and eternal life. It is that Spirit that bears witness with our human spirits that we are children of God. And it is that Spirit that assures us that we are joint heirs with Christ Jesus, the eternal Son of the one God.

It is appropriate today to recite the Athanasian creed found in the prayer book on pages 864-865 rather than the Nicene creed. Since it is rather long and pedantic, we will not do that, however, I would encourage you to read it at your leisure, slowly and thoroughly many times. It says. "We worship one God in Trinity, neither confounding the persons, nor diving the substance. The persons of the Trinity are co-equal, incomprehensible, eternal, almighty, Lord; none-created, non-begotten. They are not three. They are one in different relationship

with the creation. Therein lies the mystery that is not contrary to reason but beyond it.

Therefore, today, we affirm that God is one in unity and yet co-equal and co-eternal in the three manifestations of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Have a Holy Trinity Sunday and a Spirit-filled Pentecost season. Amen.