

Matthew 28:16-20

Trinity Sunday

June 7, 2020—Shepherd of the Mountains, Pinetop, AZ

INI

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, who is your God?

I was in my second year in seminary. My classmates were feeling pretty good about ourselves. We were armed with our knowledge from way back in confirmation days. We had made it through seminary entrance interviews with pastors and district presidents. We had navigated the arduous first year of seminary learning new languages (well old languages, but new to us.) We thought we knew some stuff.

And then in one class, the professor asked the class that question, “who is your God?” *“Easy, guys. We got this,”* we thought. After all, Luther’s Small Catechism was still rattling around in our brains even if we didn’t remember it word for word. And most of us had read the Large Catechism and knew that, “A ‘god’ is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart.” Large Catechism, 1st Commandment So most of us nodded our heads when someone answered “the God of scripture,” thinking that was a pretty good answer.

“Try again,” was the reply from the professor.

OK, how about “Jesus.”

“Try again.”

“Yahweh.”

“Try again.”

“Immanuel.”

“The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

“Try again.”

“Alright, we give up.”

“God, properly speaking, is the Father, who sends His Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit.”

“Wait. How is that any different from the answers we gave?”

Well, it turns out, how you and I speak about God is important. It’s not enough to simply say you believe in “God.” That could mean anything. A Hindu can claim to have a god. An ancient Greek could claim to have a god. A Muslim can claim to have a god and even cite some of the same OT passages as us. An LDS member can claim to have a god and quote many of the same verses as us throughout both the OT and the NT. Various people could look out in nature and conclude there is a god and claim to have a god or even many gods. Others could look to and cite various scriptures. But which scripture? Which god? To whom do you look for all good and to find refuge? Who is your god and what does he do and how do we know about him?

The Christian Church throughout the ages has confessed faith in the Triune God. Our reading from Matthew this morning gives us the clearest definition of who that is within one single verse. There is one God, a triune God, with a singular name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But we find the word triune and trinity nowhere in the Bible. Yet the truth behind these words is all over the place.

From the very beginning, we see the Father creating order out of chaos, creating everything out of nothing, with the Holy Spirit hovering over the face of the waters. We hear the Word of God going forth as the agent of creation and John makes it very clear in his Gospel account that this Word is Jesus Christ. One God from the beginning, three persons from the beginning, all working with united will. A triune God. A Trinity.

Today is Trinity Sunday. It’s the day we celebrate approximately halfway through the church year, give or take a few weeks depending on where Easter lands for a given year. Up until now, starting with the season of Advent back in December, we have had several festive days. Christmas Eve,

Christmas Day, the Baptism of our Lord, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter morning, Ascension. All of these special days have their own significance.

We celebrate these feast days to commemorate various events in the life of Christ, His earthly ministry as He carried out the Father's will, the salvation plan for you and me and the whole world. Then last week we celebrated Pentecost, the transition point in Jesus' ministry as the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, began carrying out the mission of the Church, which is really still Jesus' ministry. But wait, there's more! Today we hear about what that mission and ministry is with the Great Commission. And we celebrate it with one more feast day. But this feast day does not commemorate an event in Jesus' life. This feast day celebrates the very God who is the focus of this mission and ministry.

There is no more messianic secret, no more strictly charging the disciples to tell no one. No, now is the time to go. Go out to all nations. Baptize. Make disciples. Teach. But what are they supposed to teach? This is one of the reasons why Trinity Sunday is an important day in the church year. Because if you get the teaching right, amazing things start happening in people's lives. But if you're wrong, well, you're dead wrong. And many who hear the wrong teaching share the same fate.

In reality, each Sunday is a Trinity Sunday. We begin our worship with that divine name that was spoken over us in baptism. Our liturgy and hymns and preaching point to the ongoing activity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—a God who is over us, who is for us, and who is with and in us. And each week we confess our faith in this Triune God with one of our creeds—The Apostles' Creed which is the oldest and most brief of the creeds, The Nicene Creed which adds some emphasis to the nature of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit, and the Athanasian Creed which is the longest and which makes it very clear that all three persons are God, yet not three Gods, but one God.

Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold to this catholic (or universal) faith. Whoever does not keep it whole and undefiled will without doubt perish eternally. And we can't possibly begin to understand how this all works. But fortunately, God does not ask us to understand completely. He only requires that we believe. And even that faith that believes is a gift from the Holy Spirit. We don't have to know all the mechanics of our salvation and of the fullness of the Trinity. But there is one thing that we must get right, at least to the best of our mere human ability and understanding. We must get that God is the Father, who sent His Son, in the power of His Holy Spirit.

This is our God. This in fact, is the only true God. These three Persons working in unity devised a salvation plan for you back before the world was formed, before the Spirit hovered over the face of the waters, before the Word came forth bringing all things into existence. The Father would send His Son to be born into human flesh. This Son would carry out the Father's will, dying on a cross for the sins of the world, and He would be resurrected again. That this Jesus whom you and I crucified, not by our hands holding nails and hammers, but by our sins, God has raised Him up again and has made Him Lord and Christ. And risen from the dead and ascended on high, He has sent His Holy Spirit to be with us, and in us, to comfort us, and to bring us to the knowledge of the saving truth. That is the Triune faith, the Christian faith, saving faith. We confess this faith in the words of one of our creeds each week because our confession of who God is and what He has done changes His confession of us.

For those who confess another god, for any who deny any member of the Triune God, God, the true God's confession of them is this: sinner, blasphemer, murderer, adulterer, thief, slanderer, liar—the shorthand: condemned. It turns out it matters what we confess about God, what we say about Him, what we believe about Him. These creeds are a matter of life and death, eternal life and death. So, let us join together in confessing our Christian faith in the words of our creed which speaks of our Triune God whose name is majestic above all the heavens, who is mindful of us mere men and women, the only God who gives us eternal life. Because for you and I who confess our saving faith in the Triune God today, and not with just our voices but with our hearts, His confession of us changes to this: Child of God, Brother/Sister in Christ, washed, cleansed, called—the shorthand: redeemed. Amen.