

Sunday: The Holy Trinity
Date: June 7, 2020
Text: Matthew 28:16-20
Title: A Solid Foundation

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me.

These days we hear a lot about science. Every Coronavirus press conference repeatedly trumpets science in dealing with the Pandemic we are mired in. But the science seems to be ever changing. As new “facts” are discovered, the foundation of the scientific theories crumble and are forced to be reexamined and modified. In this era of COVID-19 we struggle to understand what is happening because the foundation of our theories is built on a bed of sand.

Science is intended to give us confidence in the theories we generate as they are proven over time. Facts and observations are gathered to strengthen our understanding of an event or occurrence. These become the foundation for further theories as our knowledge expands to encompass more areas. Initially, what we call science, was our efforts to better understand the world around us and learn more about our Creator. The complexity of the world around us points far beyond random mutations and combinations to reach the results of an environment that can and does sustain life. All the evidence in this world points to a single creation event. Some call it the big bang. Well, it sort of was. It was big, and it carried a huge bang, because when God spoke, amazing things happened. You might say “Bang” and it was done.

Trying to understand God, has been on mankind’s mind since Adam and Eve were first placed in the Garden of Eden. Tempted by Satan to try to understand the mind of God, to become little gods, to be like God, resulted in the sin that haunts us still today. Questioning the Word of God, questioning who God really is, and in so doing, putting faith in our observations instead of trusting the veracity of God’s proclamation.

In the last hundred years or so, God has been relegated to a role of filling the gaps “science” could not explain. With each new discovery, God was pushed further and further away from earthly reality. God was diminished by scientific theories. These efforts have lured people to put their trust in the “science” of the

day and in themselves to the exclusion of trusting the one who sent his only Son to die for us.

To pursue science to the exclusion of God ignores the evidence that is truly before us. God has given us a written record of his activity in the Scriptures that have been written and handed down for thousands of years. From the first writings of Moses to the final writing of the beloved disciple John, God had given us a testimony of what he did in creation. He has given us the history of our failures. And he has given us the facts and the testimonies of witnesses regarding his redemptive work in Christ Jesus his only begotten Son. In the words of Holy Writ, we have the inerrant Word of God, given us for the purpose of pointing to Christ as our way to the Father. All scripture points to Jesus and his work of redemption. Jesus took the sins of the whole world upon his shoulders as he walked this earth and paid the price for our iniquities on the cross. Jesus died so that we might live. Jesus rose on the third day so that we would see the power of God to fulfill the promises he makes and show us our future in the resurrection of the body. Jesus ascended into heaven to continue his work on our behalf as he pleads before God for our forgiveness. As we come before God on the last day, we will not be judged for the sins we have committed, but God will instead see the righteousness of Christ, the robe of righteousness placed on our flesh. We will be seen as worthy to enter the kingdom of heaven because of the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

For a scientific investigation to be fruitful, it must begin with a solid foundation. Much like the building of a tall building, if the foundation is not sound, the structure will ultimately fail. This is true for our faith in our creator as well. If we do not have a solid theology or doctrine of who God is, we will struggle to live a life that is able to withstand the lure of the evil one's temptation to trust in what we see around us, or to trust in ourselves exclusively. This is what Holy Trinity Sunday as we celebrate it today unique and necessary in our church year.

Holy Trinity Sunday is the only Sunday of the church liturgical calendar that focuses on a doctrine instead of an event. To aid us in building our faith on the rock of salvation instead of the shifting sands of human thought, we focus one Sunday each year on the most basic of teaching of the church. Who is God?

The world is full of examples of needing to have a strong grasp of basics to build upon. Many a coach has vowed to "get back to basics" in an effort to improve the performance of his players. When I played baseball in school, we

drilled and drilled and drilled on the basics to make sure we were ready for the challenges we faced in actual games. Preparation was the key to successfully navigating the events that happened in games.

In elementary school, I remember repeatedly drilling on multiplication tables. Doing problems over, and over, and over again until I was proficient in getting the correct answers. To this day, I can still multiply numbers in my head, although not as quickly as I used to.

The same need for a solid foundation based upon repeatedly drilling on the basics goes for life including our spiritual life.

The doctrine of the Trinity is critical for a solid faith. If we get the identity of God wrong, our faith becomes a house of cards that will fall when the winds of culture blow against it. When challenged by a world that has lost sight of God, confidence in our salvation begins to twist in the wind and ultimately falls apart.

Today we reflect on God, The Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, reinforcing the foundation of our faith. Our ability to wrap our minds around this God is ultimately beyond human reason. We are limited in our intellect by our nature and our nurture. We are taught from an early age to develop proofs to solve questions posed. In math we are taught the Pythagorean Theorem to discern the length of a side of a right triangle. We can understand the mechanics of this equation and it provides us with satisfaction and confidence. Hard sciences tend to provide us with greater clarity in the world around us. On the other hand, things like philosophy, are much more difficult to comprehend. As we encounter faith and our spirituality, it takes wisdom from outside of us to believe in what God does for us.

Paul speaks of seeing God around us as he writes about people who reject God choosing to trust in themselves for salvation

¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse. ²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³and exchanged the glory of the

immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (Romans 1:19-22).

This is why we must return daily to God's word to bolster our faith and reinforce our foundation. The Scriptures reveal to us who God is. In our Gospel reading today, Jesus clearly articulates that God is three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As he is preparing to ascend into heaven, our Lord instructs the disciples to teach all that he has commanded and to baptize all people in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus identification of the Trinity reflects the teaching of all of God's Word. In our reading from Genesis this morning, the three persons of the Godhead are present at the creation of the world. Not only in the identification of making man in our image, but in the very first act of creation.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light..." (Genesis 1:1-3).

The beloved disciple John reflects on the presence of Jesus at the creation of the world in his gospel.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. (John 1:1-3).

John continues in verse 14,

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The unity of God is testified to by Jesus as he responds to Philip's request to show him the Father, [Jesus] and the Father are one, and if you have seen the me, you have seen the Father.

The identity, unity and personage of God is difficult to comprehend to say the least. It is something that is given to us in faith. The Holy Spirit, the active, vibrant builder of faith in our hearts, gives to the ability to accept God for who he professes to be. As we look around us, we see the magnificent work he has done and continues to do for us today.

God's work for us included the death and resurrection of Jesus our Lord. For our salvation to be efficacious, we are told that a sinless sacrifice would have to be made to take the punishment for our sins. The animal sacrifices of the Old Testament, especially the Yom Kippur sacrifices, prefigured the place of our sins on the sacrifice and the atoning death of that carrier. After a sin offering was offered in the temple, the Priest took a live goat and placed the sins of the people on its head and it with the sins was driven from the community. The sacrifice of the goat was the putting away of the sins from the presence of the people and of God who dwelled in their midst. This sacrifice for and driving out of sins is what Jesus accomplished for us on the Cross. The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, paid the price for our sins and removed them from before God.

This sacrifice of Christ is only valuable if we understand and believe in Jesus as true God and true man. An ordinary man could not provide the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And if God did not require a payment for our disobedience, we would be left without confidence in God as being a just and righteous God.

It is difficult to understand the complexities of the Trinity. To aid us in comprehending who God is and growing in faith we confess the Athanasian Creed on Holy Trinity Sunday, as well as other days. This creed focuses on who God is. Written by the church fathers over 1500 years ago, it uses our limited vocabulary to describe God in his unity and in his three persons. Through its many descriptions of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we approach the identity of God in words that embrace his unique identity and nature. This creed provides a solid foundation for our understanding of God and his actions to redeem mankind.

If we lose sight of who God is then the death of Christ loses its significance and all the other things we read in Scripture and are taught about our faith crumble. If it was not God, in the person of Jesus, who died on the cross, our salvation is lost. If Jesus was not the incarnate Son of God, born of human flesh, his death has little relevance for our eternal life. If Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not coeternal and coequal, we are still lost in our sin and condemned.

But God in His wisdom has revealed to us the truth of his nature and identity for the purpose of creating a cohesive faith that draws us to the Father through Christ Jesus our Lord, by the power and working of the Holy Spirit. Therefore we worship Jesus the Christ begotten from the substance of the Father before all ages, Man born from the substance of His mother in this age who is perfect God and perfect man, composed of a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the Father with

respect to his divinity, less that the Father with respect to His humanity. Although he is God and man, He is not two, but one Christ: one, however, not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh, but by the assumption of humanity into God:

It is this God the Son who humbled himself by taking on human flesh, dying on a cross for you and for me. This we believe as God the Father has revealed it to us by the power of God the Holy Spirit.

May God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Three persons, One God bless you with a firm foundation in the identity of God and enable you to remain in the one true faith in Christ Jesus to life everlasting.

In Jesus' Name.

Amen