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Festival of The Holy Trinity Series A 2017

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Festival of Holy Trinity June 11

I wrote a few thoughts on the Trinity for your consideration. It is coming as an attached document with this one. You may want to pull out the Athanasian Creed for this Sunday. It is technically one of our creeds, but this is about the only time it gets used anymore. It is long enough you might want to do this antiphonally.

Our texts today will culminate in perhaps one of the most familiar of all: The great commission at the end of Matthew. It will work an almost irresistible draw on the preacher and well it should. Jesus is speaking to the Church of every age and giving us our very reason to exist: Go make disciples.

But the wise preacher will remember to look at the other readings assigned to the day.

Collect for the Day

Almighty and everlasting God, You have given us grace to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity by the confession of a true faith and to worship the Unity in the power of the Divine Majesty. Keep us steadfast in this faith and defend us from all adversities; for You, O Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, live and reign one God, now and forever.

The prayer starts us out on the glorious and terrifying aspects of God. He is almighty and everlasting, but then it goes to God the gift giver. As if we did not pick up on that, it tells us that the gift is a gift of grace, isn't that redundant?

The gift is a strange one to most of us. We are given a gift to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity. Like a kid who opens a package of underwear on Christmas morning we are tempted to say "thanks" here but not be terribly convincing. But that is a mistake. Underwear is actually pretty important and the confession of the Trinity is essential to calling ourselves Christian. But this is not our doing it really is a gift, a gift made possible by the Holy Spirit.

The acknowledgment of the glory of the Trinity comes by a confession of the true faith. In this day and age, this will sound odd to people. Is there a true faith? Many will question this and Trinity is a frontal assault on that sort of thinking.

The other gift is to worship the Unity in the power of the divine Majesty. English, being a Latin derived language fails us here. Greek has multiple words for essence/substance. They can use one for the single and one for the three-ness. God thus has one substance and three substances. In Greek it works better than it does for us. So we are stuck with talking about Trinity and Unity, and capitalizing them. What does that mean?

The petition is rather simply. Keep us steadfast in this faith and protect us from adversities. The prayer is much more in the ascription above.

How will we preach trinity in a way that anyone of our parishioners would actually pray to keep it? How many of our people would actually fight for the doctrine of the Trinity? How many of us would actually recommend it?

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

¹In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The 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.

³And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." ⁷And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

¹¹And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. ¹²The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, ¹⁵and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. ¹⁶And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." ²¹So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." ²³And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. ²⁵And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

²⁷So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." ²⁹And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. ³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

¹Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ²And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. ³So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

⁴ These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, *in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.*

Every time this text comes up, I am reminded of my dentist who was tapped at his congregation in California to read at an outdoor service at the last minute, a typo in the bulletin said that the scripture reading was Genesis 1-12, when it was supposed to be Genesis 1:1-12. He was well into chapter two before the pastor walked over and told him "that's enough, Bob."

Of course this is a hot topic today, but I think for all the wrong reasons. We get it today because the Trinity is the revelation of the One who made the whole thing.

If you are tempted to preach this one, there are some really excellent things to say about this.

The ancient world in which Moses wrote had many stories about how the world came to be. They were all bloody and violent. If you want to read one, Google "Enuma Elish" and you should be able to find one. In this story the God's of Babylon war among themselves, finally defeating the evil goddess of chaos, Tiamat. Looking at her massive carcass they wonder what to do with it,

finally settling on splitting it in half, with the top becoming the sky and the bottom half the waters of the earth from which the land will be taken. As an afterthought, man is created as a toy and servant of the Gods.

Contrast that with Moses account and you will find a fundamentally positive message that is often lost in the whole creation/evolution debates of modernity. The creation story heard by the Babylonians was chaotic, bloody, and accidental. The gods did not plan it, they did not even want it. It was simply the best thing to do with the carcass of a monstrous defeated enemy. Mankind was an afterthought, created to please the gods. In Moses account God has planned the whole thing. He delights in the creation at every step. There is no violence here, there is the stately speaking of the word, and then the word takes shape in reality. The structure in all this is really remarkable. Consider the chart below:

Day 1 Light

Day 4 Sun, moon, and stars

Day 2 Sea and Sky

Day 5 Birds and fish

Day 3 Land and Plants

Day 6 Man and animals.

As you can see, the order in which things were made required thought, planning. Day one corresponds to day four, day two matches up to day five, etc. The message that Moses seems to want to get across is that we are the result of a plan, that God delights in the creation, that God has thought this thing out and that he wants the creation and he loves the creation.

Now, contrast that with the evolutionist today. The issue is not really about how long it took. In fact, the Christian probably needs to admit that discerning another message and the poetic nature of Genesis 1 at least leaves open the idea that this is not a calendar description. The message seems to be that you and I are not the product of random processes but the intentional creation of a loving God who delights in us. Too often the fight over this passage is about how old the earth is or how we fit dinosaurs into the Genesis time table. But in truth, that misses the real point of Genesis one. God delights in his creation, he loves it. Man is not plaything of the gods nor just a randomly generated mote in a massive and randomly-run universe, but the intended, delightful, beloved pinnacle of an orderly, planned, and good creation. Remember the world looked capricious, violent, and cruel to the ancients so they projected that one their creation story. Our world looks to be random, without meaning, and wholly without God. Thus we project that onto our current understanding of origins provided by science: Evolution. The text of Genesis 1 speaks a loud and beautiful objection to both of them.

This actually has implications for the whole salvation story. The other story, the one about the accidental and unintentional creation will show up again in the Gnostic creation stories. There

Jesus will not really be a man, but just looking like a man. He will not come to shed real red blood to save the whole world, but he will impart knowledge so we can escape this random, evil, and capricious world.

How many of our own people today don't operate with the basic idea of Gnosticism. Heaven is a place where we don't have real bodies but harps and halos and we are so light that we can walk on the clouds. Reality is down here on earth, that is ethereal. Or, if they are of another way of thinking, the world to come is real and this is just a passing phantasm. Both of these notions miss something. God loves this physical world. We don't go to heaven, heaven comes to us. (cf. Rev. 20-21)

The Creation story is fundamental to the expression of Trinity and therefore the story of Salvation. Remember that Trinity is all about who is on the cross. The guy on the cross is the Lord of heaven and earth, he made the whole thing and the first thing he said about it was that it was good, very good. He loved it. It was that love of creation that brought him to that cross in the first place. God did not make us to escape this world; rather, Jesus came in the flesh of this world to redeem it, including the physicality of the creation. This is why it is so important to say that I believe in the resurrection of the body. That line in the creed is tightly bound to the first article which asserts that God made the world, including this body. The creation will show up again in the creed when we confess the incarnation of Christ.

What is Genesis 1 really saying to us?

- 1. God made the world.*
 - a. As creator he gets to make the rules, including the rules that govern my life.*
 - b. As creator he gets to have expectations of the creation*
 - c. As creator he gets to render judgment. Did I meet his expectation?*
 - d. As creator he gets to destroy it, rightfully.*
- 2. God loves his creation*
- 3. God intended his creation – the ancients saw creation as an accident or afterthought. The moderns see it as a random, ungoverned process of evolutionary but impersonal “forces.”*

Psalm 8

¹O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
² Out of the mouth of babies and infants,

you have established strength because of your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.

³When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,

⁴what is man that you are mindful of him,
and the son of man that you care for him?

⁵Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.

⁶You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet,

⁷all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,

⁸the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

⁹O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Acts 2:14a, 22-36 I know we heard this not long ago, but the next verses are really worth including here. The omitted section after verse 14 was of course last week's reading.

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them:

²²"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—
²³this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ²⁵For David says concerning him,

"I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken;
²⁶therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;
my flesh also will dwell in hope.
²⁷For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,
or let your Holy One see corruption.
²⁸You have made known to me the paths of life;
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'

²⁹"Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his

throne, ³¹he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. ³²This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. ³³ 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. ³⁴For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

"The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand,
³⁵until I make your enemies your footstool.'

³⁶Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

³⁷Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." ⁴⁰And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation." ⁴¹So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

I am always amazed at Peter's sermon here. The resurrection is proclaimed but it is not good news. Jesus is Lord and Messiah, but that also is not good news, at least not initially. The fact is he is addressing the very crowds that had yelled "crucify!" Now the one they thought to be rid of is proclaimed as risen from the dead and the very God whom they have come to worship. They have done their worst and it did not contain him. They are powerless before him and he has every right to extract vengeance.

Is it any wonder that their response to this sermon is to say "Brothers, what shall we do?"

How would we preach this text and convict and restore people like Peter did today? It is probably a little much to think that we will do so, but he uses the three person of the Trinity to convict them. The Father has shown their act of crucifying Jesus was totally evil. He raised him from the dead. God the Spirit has validated the witness of Peter and the others by the mighty wind, the tongues of flame and the speaking in various languages.

How would we convict folks? They may not be shouting crucify him, crucify him! But are we not pretty blasé about that resurrection? Do we not yawn when we think about the resurrected Christ? Does his resurrection actually show up in our lives? Or do we live indistinguishable lives from our neighbors, blending in comfortably to a society that is increasingly going off the rails? Is that convicting? Most of the folks who will hear us will smugly assume the preacher is talking about someone else because they are in church.

Peter saw three thousand conversions that day. Is the conviction of our sin in the fact that our churches are full of grey hair and suffering from declining membership? Is the fact that an entire generation of people have been confirmed in our churches and left really the conviction by the Holy Spirit? We are not suffering a problem of the wrong sort of worship or inadequate parking or a poor building. We are suffering from a faith problem?

Is the conviction really the conviction of the Church? Does our own Christianity and its expression in our midst really the problem? Do we play church on Sunday mornings? Do we turn our church into a club where people like us are welcome, but that is it. But again, this a conviction of the individual sinner in the pew.

This text shows up today because in the salvation act, the Trinity shows up. The Father raises Jesus up and then, at the request of Jesus, pours out the Spirit. Remember, outside of these actions, we really cannot tell the difference between the persons of the Trinity.

The preacher who wants to come to this text has a challenge in that Peter's audience needed to hear a strong condemnation of their position over against God. Do our hearers need the same condemnation? They are here because they are confessing the Trinity and the work of Christ in saving them. What does this text say to us?

Peter's message is really a simple retelling of the good news story, but I think it has a real punch to it that makes the gospel lesson even better. Notice Peter points his hearers not only to the Christ event and the history which went on before, but also to the very things which are before the eyes of the audience. He points to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on that first Pentecost as evidence of the good work of God in Christ.

I think that the Holy Spirit has not stopped doing such good things in this day and age. In truth, He is still at it and going strong. What will we point our hearers to see? Or perhaps better, what shall we equip our hearers to indicate when they would tell this Jesus event to their neighbors and friends and family. The bare story about Jesus did not even suffice for the first generation of Christians, they pointed to contemporary events and connected them to the Jesus story. That is at the heart of evangelism. Evangelism is not just about telling people about the distant past but it is also interpreting for them the events which their own eyes have seen, either personally or through you.

This pattern of real evangelism is found right here in Peter's sermon. If I find my neighbor marveling at the generosity of a Christian, better if it is myself, I have to be ready with the reason for the hope I have, for the generosity I have. I better be ready to connect that event to the Jesus event. I am generous because Christ has been generous to me. Likewise if my neighbor sees me hosting a group of folks every Tuesday night and wonders what I am doing, I should not point to an institution down the street that tapped me to lead a home bible study. I would hope that we would point to the Jesus who spoke long ago and who continues to speak to me in that word called Scripture.

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I with you AM always, to the end of the age."

If you love the gospel and mission of the Church, this is one of the most precious of texts and well worthy of that attention. Jesus is at the end of his earthly ministry and gives us his parting instructions here.

The disciples are in Galilee because they listened to Jesus and heeded his instructions. He had told them through the women at the tomb to head up there and he would meet them there. We don't know where he told them about the mountain. We also don't exactly know how to fit this into the Lucan account which has Jesus telling them to remain in Jerusalem. How does this all fit together? I don't know exactly, but nor am I terribly worried about that. But Matthew does want you to understand that they are there because Jesus told them to go there. They listened to that. I think the operative word here is obedience.

They see Jesus, they worship and yet some doubt. The disciples are not of one mind. They still don't have this straight. One does not need to be perfectly committed to be a disciple. In fact, disciples have struggled with doubt ever since. We are not expected to be perfect, in fact sometimes we will have our own difficult struggles of faith. Any serious Christian who tells you he or she has never doubted sounds like they have selective amnesia to me. I am not a big proponent of doubt, but it does seem to go with the territory. I think it is helpful to notice that doubt may not just be the opposite of faith. It might be better understood to be "double-minded" or of two minds on a subject.

Jesus comes to them and speaks. It is time to listen.

"All authority has been given to me." We are unfortunately saddled with English as a language here. I like English, but it has some limitations which are not found in the Greek. Because Greek is a declined and inflected language, the Greeks can play with word order in some particular ways, allowing them to emphasize certain words. In Greek the word is this: "Given to me is all authority in heaven and on earth..."

English hearers tend to hear Authority and hear a power and rule making sort of word and it dominates the whole conversation from that point. But the Greek starts us off with gift. The emphasis is clearly on the gift and not on the authority piece. But that just doesn't work in English. It should however be highlighted in the preaching. Jesus is talking about a gift here and that is what he says first.

Next, this is fun to do with a Bible study, count how many forms of “all” occur in these short verses. If you understand that the Hebrew way to say all is to talk about both ends of the spectrum (hence “heaven and earth” is another way of saying “all”), this gets really interesting. In Greek I count about 8 of them. The KJV version actually makes this a little easier. What is going on with all the “all” phrases? The inclusive nature of this text is obviously something that Matthew wants you to see in this thing. But what is he saying with it? How do we interpret this? I think we will want to talk about this on Tuesday.

The next thing is to notice the grammar here. The main clause is “go make disciples.” In Greek and English the dependent clauses, using participles, are the descriptions of how to do that. “Baptizing” and “Teaching” These are the means to make a disciple, but the goal is always to make a disciple, not just to teach for teachings sake, to baptize for baptism’s sake. I find this really helpful when the grandparents want to sneak over to Church and get the grandchild baptized without the parents knowing it. The goal is not the baptism but the disciple making and that takes both teaching and baptism. If the teaching isn’t going to happen, we probably should not be doing the baptism behind the parents back. The Gospel has not abrogated the family structure and the fourth commandment which enjoins us to honor parents.

But notice that both baptism and teaching are part of this. In the case of infants we baptize with an eye toward the teaching that will be appropriate when they can learn, but this does not wait until we get them in confirmation. It is happening right away too. They say a toddler learns 60% of what he will ever learn by the time he is three years old. He learns how to talk, how to smile, how to deal with hurt and anger and how to love. He will learn another 20% of his total knowledge by the time he gets to kindergarten. The most effective teachers you have in your congregation are the parents of children. By the time you get them in confirmation you can only affect about 20% of their learning or less. If parents are not teaching their children that when they pray someone listens, they are not going to listen to your exhortation about prayer, especially when they are 14 years old. When parents drop their kids off for Sunday School and do not study the Bible themselves, the lesson learned is that the Bible is for kids and not adults and thus your instruction about the third commandment will fall on deaf ears. When mom and dad don’t pray at home, the lesson learned is that prayer is something only church people do and at church. They are always teaching, but they may not know it.

This is the reason I detest children’s church. Our children are segregated from us all too much these days. They need to see us praying fervently in church, they need to see us singing songs and worshiping as though we were really talking to someone important, to God himself. If they don’t see us doing that, how will they learn to worship as an adult?

Enough of my ranting! The order of the baptism and the teaching are not that important. An adult, who can learn, is taught first and then baptized. It is good that people are respected enough to let them know what they are getting into before actually initiate them into Christianity. It could go the other way too and in certain circumstances I have done it that way.

The place I want you to look is to the final phrase of the entire book and I think this may be the Gospel for the whole book of Matthew. Again we have to come into the Greek for this, but bear with me, it is worth it. Again it is word order that really matters but also the penchant for Greek to drop the personal pronouns as redundant.

First the pronouns: Greek is a conjugated language that means that the pronouns are really redundant. When a Greek or Hebrew speaker says “I am” they don’t usually use the “I” they just say “am” or “eimi” as it is pronounced (if you want to pronounce the word, think of the woman’s name: Amy.) Greek has specific forms for “you are” “he is” “we are” “they are” etc. This was so common in fact that it was honestly unusual for someone to use the personal pronoun “ego” which means “I”

Of course, in the Septuagint, when Moses is at the burning bush and God reveals His name as “I AM” they use the personal pronoun “EGO EIMI”

Jesus uses the unusual “ego eimi” construction here as well which has given many a theologian and interpreter of the Bible occasion to wonder if He means the Tetragrammaton of the Old Testament. Does he mean that “I AM” of the burning bush scene? Most have answered “yes” to that question.

Now things get even better. Because the phrase above says that we should baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit. But the Greek word for “in” also means “into.”

The Greek word order in this last phrase is more accurately stated “I with you am to the end of the age.” Notice “I with you am.” In short, there you are in the middle of God’s name. the Baptismal piece worked, You were baptized “into” the name of God and there you are, right in the middle of “I...AM.”

This is not the only place where this shows up in Matthew. In that most important chapter 18 of Matthew where he discusses forgiveness, in verse 20 the same phrase shows up again. Wherever two or three gather in my name, there I am with them. Again we see the “Ego eimi” phrase with “them” In the middle of it.

But I think this goes even earlier in the book of Matthew. I have always thought it odd that at the birth of Christ in Matthew he references the Isaiah 7 prophecy and the name of the child is “Emmanuel” or God with us. Has Matthew buried Emmanuel into his book this way? I think so.

So what is a preacher to say today? There is so much! I look forward to our discussion on Tuesday. Here are a few Law and Gospel points to ponder, but we will be coming up with more and a theme for Sunday that night.

Law

1. We cannot understand the Trinity, it simply defies our mental abilities. We are limited human beings and we hate that.
2. God, without Trinity is not our friend. While it is fashionable to talk of finding God in nature, we don't really want to. The God revealed in nature does not know forgiveness. Just ask the people of Alabama, Japan, or Joplin this spring about the God one encounters in nature.
3. God's nature, the beautiful thing he called "good" repeatedly in Genesis 1 has been thoroughly messed up. It is broken.
4. There was once a perfect man who walked this earth. We put him through a kangaroo court, convicted him under false charges, and killed him, horribly. He did not stay dead but has conquered death and grave. Humanity's best attempt to be rid of this perfect man has failed. Now he is in charge of everything. God has validated him and we have demonstrated our real allegiance when we tried to kill him.
5. There is only one reason for the Church to exist, and that is to make disciples. We are not doing a very good job – the LCMS and Christianity in general in North America is not even keeping up with population growth. The fastest growing religious category in the Northwest is "none of the above."
6. We are personally not very good disciples either. Plagued by doubts and serious incompetency, we are not good evangelists, sometimes we fail even in the most basic disciple tasks of listening and following the master.

Gospel

1. God has revealed the Trinity and through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we have the ability to confess it, even if we don't always understand it.
2. The incarnation of Christ Jesus, God in the flesh, is God's answer to the broken creation. He did not crumple it up, throw it away and start over, he sent his beloved Son into the flesh to shed his real red blood to fix it.
3. Thus as God reveals himself to us, he reveals his gracious and kindly face. The same creator whose rules we have transgressed is also the good shepherd who dresses our wounds and carries us home. Both are true, but in the revelation which is Jesus Christ, we experience the graciousness of God.
4. God has taken the worst act humanity ever perpetrated, the death of the one innocent man who ever lived, and turned it into the occasion for sin and death to be defeated for all of us. Christ has not risen to assume the authority to destroy us, but the authority to give us life. He speaks of gifts not prisons, grace not punishment.

5. This has equipped us with an amazing story to tell. We look at the same world as everyone else, but now we see the goodness of God reflected to us. The bread we eat, the families who love us, the money we earn, the whole thing is a gift from God now. This is not just an ancient story but a current story. God is very concerned about the real lives we live right now. He delights in his creation and now that Jesus has redeemed it, he doubly delights in it. The Gospel story is a real story, a true, here and now story.
6. God very much does want that story to get out there, he wants it so much he continues to bless and help it grow and get out there. It is true that Christianity is not growing in North America, but it will and it is right now in other parts of the world. The Christian does not need to feel that the Spirit has abandoned us, but rather to wait in eager expectation for the good things the Spirit will do and to take a step out in faith to be an occasion for that Spirit to act. God loves people and wants to save them.

Sermon Themes:

1. In the Image of God (Gospel and OT - that the Spirit of God would enfold the hearer in the privileged relationship of the Trinity.)

Illustration: Can you imagine a marriage in which we lived in the same house but did not talk, hardly related to one another, did not live as if we were married, but simply were married in a legal sense? That would be a pretty pathetic marriage. On the outside the world might think they are married, but in fact it is empty and dry and lifeless. To be married means that we love one another, talk to each other, serve one another, delight in what happens to our spouse in that day. The real “guts” of a marriage are not in the legality, but in the relationship which we share with one another.

Too many Christians are Christian in the legal sense only. They go to church, they outwardly appear to be in that club, at least they have membership, but it is not the rich relationship which God has in mind. Nor does such a Christianity really enjoy the beautiful life which God has in mind, the life which God called “good” in Genesis 1.

Genesis tells us that we are created in God’s image. There are lots of ways we talk about that image of God, but one way is think of that relationally. The Father, Son, and Spirit are relationally defined. They love – indeed John says that God is love in I John 4:8. To be in the image of God is to be in relationship with Him and one another.

At the end of the great commission in Matthew, Jesus talks about us that way. The name of God is I AM. But when Jesus makes that promise to us that he is with us always, he says, “I with you AM”. The name of God is interrupted by us. We are right there in the middle of his name. When Jesus said we are baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Spirit, he seems to have meant that quite literally. We are right there in the middle of God’s name!

This sermon needs to challenge the hearer with this Good News. The challenge is that this enfolding image of God, this relationship of love, is not just an idea, but it is a life. The marriage which thinks about loving your spouse but never doing it is not really yet a marriage. It is better than plotting ways to make the other suffer, but it is not yet really a marriage. Marriage is lived, embodied, when we hold each other's hands, take a walk, talk, and actively love one another in word and deed. (Again, see I John 4)

This love with which God has enfolded us is not a thing to be had and to put on a shelf, it is a reality which shapes and changes and transforms our lives and every relationship we have. God has in our Baptisms put us quite literally into the name of God. He with us IS. This makes us new.

2. The Great Commission – Not the Great Suggestion! (That the Spirit of God would move and motivate the hearer to embrace his/her calling as a witness to the resurrection of Christ and an instrument through which disciples are made.)

The Trinity is best used and not explained. It might be a little like my car. I really am perplexed when I look under the hood. But I can use it. The Christian uses the Trinity when he/she confesses the creation, redemption, and rescue of the world through the God who made it, sent Jesus to save, and poured out the Spirit to make it holy.

This sermon will want to remember that Jesus, gifted with all authority, gives great gifts to his people today, but with an urgent purpose. He loves this whole world and would save it all. Strangely, he has sent us to be the bearers of that good news. Flawed disciples long ago and flawed members of this congregation are now the ambassadors of God's love to this world, bearing an urgent message which they need to hear.

Look at Peter at Pentecost – is a fisherman who is not educated or experienced, but he is a powerful preacher of the good news this day because he has the Spirit poured out by Christ's authority.

Word of mouth is the best sort of advertising – to be an evangelist is to tell the good news of what has happened to me, not the good news of someone else. Evangelists are passionately in love with what they have experienced. A wine evangelist may not know the particulars of what went into the bottle, but they know they like it and they are willing to tell someone what they enjoy about it. They are the best salesmen and women. Likewise the Christian who has experienced Christ's love in a powerful way is a great evangelist.

Where can we point to the good work that Christ has done in our life? What blessings has he showered down on us? The wine evangelist is a wine enthusiast. He thirsts for the good wine, likewise the Christian evangelist; the passionate disciple maker is engaged in the relationship with God. He may not have a degree in theology, but he hungers and

thirsts for the same good news for himself that he shares with another. They have a passion for their subject.

Passion comes from experiences that are personal and profound. Gratitude is the order of the day! Christ even had a place for me. The alcoholic whose testimony is filled with abject self-debasement and wonder at the love of God is really doing this.

To make a disciple is to share a passion. We will tell others freely about a good restaurant or a good movie that we have seen. Ed still talks about one he experienced ten years ago. Discipleship also involves the next steps of the process. This might be a good time to talk about the teaching of all things as well. The individual Christian is not necessarily responsible for the whole educational experience. The congregation is part of this. this is why community.

3. I Believe God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth. (That the hearer would disengage from the pointless Creation/Evolution debate and engage in the far more important discussion of Creation's implications for him/herself and the whole world.)

This is an edgy sermon. We are going to try to call a truce in the culture wars which have been relentlessly waged in the prior generation and especially within the LCMS. But remember that the festival of Holy Trinity is about a debate, a fight really, inside the Christian Church over the very foundational theologies of the faith. That debate has shifted in the last century or so and is now located in the first article of the creed, not the second.

First of all, it is important to know what is not up for grabs here. That God created the universe, the heavens, the earth, and all that are in them is a non-negotiable. It is an article of faith, and cannot be proved. One cannot argue the skeptic into this faith, only the Spirit can give it. Once given, the Christian simply cannot fudge on this issue.

That said, however, the real message of creation is not the loud debate that has raged inside the ranks of Christendom since long before the days of Darwin. True Christianity is not found in having the right answers to the age of the earth, the role of the flood, or the mechanics of the creative process. We have spent altogether too much energy on that fight and no one is the winner. Christianity has become unnecessarily risible in too many quarters, and even worse, those who have been convinced of a literal reading of the six day creation event are left with a profoundly weakened theology and faith which trusts in the proper interpretation of Scripture instead of the Author of Scripture.

You will want to be careful with the foregoing – it is hot and there will be people who don't like it, perhaps you are one of them! But I believe we have to be able to say this or we will be perpetuating a serious problem.

What do we need to say. The Creation account in Genesis 1 is saying some really important things about this world in which we live, things which play right into the way we understand the cross and salvation itself.

- a. God is the Creator – He stands at the fountain head of being and of all existence. Without God, nothing is which is. (See John 1 to see Jesus’ role in this.)
- b. There are serious and uncomfortable implications to the prior statement. God gets to make the rules, has a right to expect them to be kept/obeyed. He gets to determine what happens if they are not kept/obeyed. Ultimately it is in his hands to crumple up this universe like an artist’s rejected sketch and toss the whole thing into the trash bin. Being the creator means he is also the judge.
- c. God’s creation is orderly and well planned. The great problem with current manifestations of secular cosmogonies is not that they are mechanically wrong. Who was there to evaluate that? The problem is that they posit we are the result of impersonal, random, accidental processes. Christian theology asserts something very different. We are a deliberate act of God. This is not the result of random processes.
- d. God made his creation good. We see great evil in the world around us and this has led to the current generation asking hard questions of our theology, especially around the question of evil. But the Bible is clear. God made it good. It is repeated in Genesis 1 too often to be ignored. The current state of affairs is a terrible fall from that goodness. We are not progressing upward, but digressing downward.
- e. God loves his creation. He is saddened by the destruction wrought by sin and has himself done something about this in the incarnation of Jesus. What is more, by incarnating Christ in all of us, by pouring out the Spirit into all of us, he continues to care for this creation through our feeble hands and deeds. No, picking up trash is not going to save the world, but being a people who care about our planet is also a witness to the love of Christ for this whole world.
- f. Jesus died for the whole of Creation (Colossians 1, John 1, Romans 8, etc.) This means that the blood of Christ, the real, red, created and sticky blood of Christ, is God so united with this creation that he restores it to the holiness which it lost and which can come only from him. We are not called upon to reject this world, but the things of this world which are in rebellion to God. This is why Jesus uses real water to baptize us, real bread and real wine to feed us, and why he continues to work through the real hands and real feet of his created, redeemed, and rescued people.

