

Holy Trinity Sunday
In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
Mathew 28:16-20

Sometimes when I'm leading chapel for our preschoolers, I ask a question like: "Who was born in Bethlehem?" And one of the children will pipe up and say, "God!" And then another child, will say, "No, it was Jesus." Needless to say, with 3 and 4 and 5 year olds, trying to explain the Trinity is a bit difficult.

Augsburg Fortress, has published a book entitled, "The Lutheran Handbook" It's kind of a mini-encyclopedia of all things Lutheran. There are a lot of helpful things in here but when you look up the Trinity, here's what it says:

"The Trinity is a mystery. Even great theologians don't completely understand it, and some scholars spend their whole lives studying it."

And so my goal this morning is not to try to explain the Trinity, my goal is to give witness to how I've experienced God, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And as I share my witness, my prayer is that you will also experience, what it means to know God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The first way, that I'd like to give witness to the Trinity this morning is to show you how God, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is woven throughout the whole Bible.

Maybe you've had a Jehovah's Witness come to your home, and one of the things they like to talk about, is that the word "Trinity" is actually not found in the Bible. But what we will find in the Bible, for example in today's Scripture readings is that God is spoken of as, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In our 2nd Reading, Paul is writing to the church in Rome, and he tells them that they have peace with God the Father, through Jesus the Son, and that God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. There's the Trinity, woven together in just five verses.

We see the same thing in the Creation story. We think of God the Father creating the world, and yet John's Gospel tells us, that "In the beginning, was the Word. And the Word, was with God, and the Word was God. The Word, is Jesus.

And the wind that swept over the face of the waters, at Creation, was the Holy Spirit. God is always working together as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We also see the Trinity in Matthew 28, as Jesus gives the Great Commission, when he says "Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

So there's the Trinity woven into the whole story of Scripture.

And Scripture forms our faith. Scripture has formed my faith.

Starting with my baptism.

My dad baptized me, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

And when he traced his thumb on my forehead, he said, "You are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ, forever."

If you remember the old Green Hymnal, you might remember that at the very beginning of the liturgy at the top of the page in red lettering, were some worship instructions.

Right above the invocation, where the pastor calls upon God, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, it said the congregation had the option of making "the sign of the cross in remembrance of their Baptism."

Now that's a custom that is very common in the Roman Catholic church but a little known fact in the Lutheran church, is that Martin Luther would make the sign of the cross on his forehead, every morning, and several times throughout the day.

And there is something about that, the physical action of touching your forehead, and feeling the sign of the cross.

When I was at the seminary, I saw for the first time, people doing this as part of a Lutheran service. I saw many of my classmates, on the way in to chapel each morning, they would stop at baptismal font, and they would stop and dip their index finger into the water, and make the sign of the cross on their forehead.

Now when I make the sign of the cross, on my forehead, it makes that same physical impression. It reminds me that I am bearing the name of God, that I was created in the image of God. And so were each one of you.

So now, one at a time, let's take the three parts of the Trinity the three parts of God's name. First of all, "In the name of the Father."

In the Old Testament, Father was a very special name, because it meant, "the One who created." This word "father" was then used to speak the name of our Creator, the Creator of the whole universe.

And yet, the word "father" also becomes very personal, it's very personal to me...because when I say "Father" it means that God created me.

It means that I am special.

Even when I don't feel that way, or if someone doesn't treat me that way, I remember that I am special, because the Creator of the whole universe, created me, just as He created each one of you.

There is a beautiful story about a little boy in West Virginia, whose parents were not married when he was born. And in those days you received a certain name when you were born out of wedlock, and it begins with B, and I won't mention it, but I think you know the name. And this little boy in that town, was called that name, and that label stuck and that became his name, in his own mind.

And his mother received another name, which began with B, and the boy heard about it. And he went around town, hanging his head and hiding, and he didn't deal with people, and he didn't hang out with kids, because they called him that name.

But there was church in the middle of that town. And some Sunday mornings he would be riding his bike through town and he would hear music coming through the windows of that church, and he would stand outside and listen to it.

And eventually he got to the place where he was brave enough to sneak in the door and he'd sit in the back and he would listen to the service. And then before the pastor got through with the benediction, he would leave.

And the pastor saw that. And so one day when the pastor got to the end of the service, instead of giving the benediction up in the front, he walked to the back and gave the benediction from the middle of the aisle.

And the boy tried to sneak out the door, and so the pastor stood in front of the door and said: "Young man." And the little boy knew it. He knew the pastor was going to scold him, and tell him "you don't belong here."

But the pastor looked at him and said,
"Young man, you are a Son of God, and God is your Father.

For the first time, the little boy realized he had a Father, a heavenly Creator, who is his Father, And he had a name that he could claim. And he felt special for the first time,

Many years later this boy became the Governor of that state.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son.

How can that be? How can this Creator God, one who is so great, so powerful how could this God possibly come to us in human form? A young man asked his Sunday School teacher this question.

His Sunday School teacher happened to be Dr. Thorogood Hansen. He was an Astrophysicist. He wasn't a pastor. He was one who studied the stars, the Universe.

And young man said to him, “Dr. Hansen, how could you possibly believe, that God could come in human form, through a virgin teenage girl named Mary? How can you believe that as a scientist, an Astrophysicist?”

And Dr. Hansen told the Sunday School class that he used to be an atheist. But the more he studied the immense universe, the smaller and smaller, he felt. Instead of feeling more brilliant, he realized how much he didn’t know.

And he began to realize that everything is so perfect in this universe, the laws of physics, the laws of mathematics, were so perfect, that there had to be a Creator. It wasn’t just an accident.

And from there he wandered into a church, a Lutheran church, and he accepted Christ as the Lord of the universe, and his Savior.

So in that Sunday School class, Dr. Hansen he looked at this young man, and said,
“If God could create the universe, if God could create all living things, who are we to tell God, what God can do?”

“Who are we to tell God, that God cannot come in human form, in Jesus Christ, to save his children that he loves so much?”

For God so loves the world, that he gave his only Son.
That whoever believes in him, may not perish, but have eternal life.”

Now I heard that story when I was a young pastor, from an older pastor who was nearly retirement. His name was Dave Abram, and he was that little boy.

Just like Pastor Abram, I am here today, because of the witness of people who helped me see how real God is. Certainly that includes my parents, my Sunday School teachers, and Craig Carlson, my youth pastor when I was in High School.

I believe in the God who created me in his name, and saved me, through his Son Jesus, the Savior who loves me so much, that he gave his life for me.

And I believe... in the Holy Spirit.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus says to his disciples,
“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things, and remind you of everything I have said to you.”

And when Jesus says, “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age,” he is talking about God sending the Holy Spirit.

The Bible tells us that in our baptism, God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, comes into our life and lives within us.

The Bible tells us that God, through the Holy Spirit, guides us, leads us, comforts us, teaches us, and sanctifies us, and keeps us in faith.

Even when we begin to wander away, God is there, constantly saying,
"you know you are mine, because I created you."

"you know you are mine, because I love you and have saved you."

And throughout your life, God is going to say, "And I will be with you forever."

Even death cannot separate us from God, the Father,
the Son, who saves us,
and the Holy Spirit who will give us life.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, that's what the sign of the cross means to me
because it was by the cross that I was saved.

Will you join me now in making the sign of the Trinity?
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen