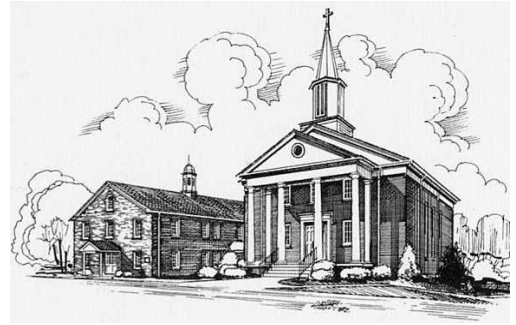


The Lessons Appointed for

Use on the

First Sunday after Pentecost:

Trinity Sunday



Year A

RCL

Matthew 28:16-20

Psalm 8

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

The Collect

The Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, you have given to us your servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of your divine Majesty to worship the Unity:

Keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see you in your one and eternal glory, O Fa-

ther; who with the Son and the Holy Spirit live and reign, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Psalm 8

Domine, Dominus noster

- 1 O LORD our Governor, *
how exalted is your Name in all the world!
- 2 Out of the mouths of infants and children *
your majesty is praised above the heavens.
- 3 You have set up a stronghold against your adversaries,
*
to quell the enemy and the avenger.
- 4 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, *
the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,
- 5 What is man that you should be mindful of him? *
the son of man that you should seek him out?
- 6 You have made him but little lower than the angels; *
you adorn him with glory and honor;
- 7 You give him mastery over the works of your hands; *
you put all things under his feet:
- 8 All sheep and oxen, *
even the wild beasts of the field,
- 9 The birds of the air, the fish of the sea, *

and whatsoever walks in the paths of the sea.

10 O LORD our Governor, *

how exalted is your Name in all the world!

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Matthew 28:16-20

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

SERMON

Today is Trinity Sunday, the first Sunday after Pentecost in the Western Christian liturgical calendar. Trinity Sunday celebrates the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the three Persons of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In particular:

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity holds that God is three consubstantial persons or hypostases—the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit—as “one God in three Divine Persons”. The three persons are distinct, yet are one “substance, essence or nature” (homoousios). In this context, a “nature” is what one is, whereas a “person” is who one is.

As the Fourth Lateran Council declared in 1215, “it is the Father who generates, the Son who is begotten, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds”. Accordingly, the whole work of creation and grace is seen as a single operation common to all three divine persons, in

which each shows forth what is proper to him in the Trinity, so that all things are “from the Father”, “through the Son” and “in the Holy Spirit”.¹

But you knew that, didn't you? I think I remember Joy explaining homoosios to me in Sunday school. Nevertheless, the Trinity is so special that one cannot call oneself Christian without embracing the doctrine of the Trinity. You can go about doing good things, loving your brother, following the Ten Commandments and being a right pleasant person, but without the Trinity, being a nice person is as far as it goes. The Trinity is that central to our faith.

Of course, I have no quarrel at all with the Trinity. I do have a quarrel with the assertion of some that they **understand** the Trinity. I don't think that is humanly possible. When someone assures me that they under-

¹ Wikipedia

stand the Trinity, I think it more self-deception than understanding. Let me tell you why I think that understanding the Trinity is beyond human ability.

First, consider that no man knows what he does not know. As a consequence, the less a man knows, the more likely he is to think himself a genius. If you know very little about something, you are very likely to think you know it well because no man knows what he does not know. This is the fallacy that convinced a failed politician and unenthusiastic lawyer to fancy that he could pastor a church. How hard could that be? The philosopher Confucius, muttered back under his voice, “Real knowledge is to know the extent of one’s ignorance”, and no less than Shakespeare agreed, saying, “The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool.” Charles Darwin said, “Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does

knowledge”. There’s even a scientific name for the phenomena: the Dunning-Kruger effect. The less well a man understands a topic, the more confident he becomes in what little he knows. And the more expert a man is in some subject, the lower his confidence, because he knows his topic well enough to realize how little he really knows.

This is the human condition. The less we know about a topic, the more confident in our ignorance we become. My father was a dam engineer – that is, he worked on dams for the Corps of Engineers. I can tell you that my dad worked on dams, but that does not mean that I understand what Dad understood, nor that I could step into his shoes and successfully do anything other than to get a bunch of people drowned as I fumbled around with that which I do not, in truth, understand at all. That is the nature of humans – we fancy we

know more than we do about things we don't really understand at all. If we know very little about something, that means that we don't know what we don't know, and we get all puffed up over our great understanding. Consequentially, when someone explains the Trinity to me in terms like "God is three consubstantial persons or hypostases—the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit—as 'one God in three Divine Persons' ", I know that they haven't really engaged the Trinity, for if they had, they would be speechless, rather than boastful. We have all been taught about the Trinity since we were knee-high to a gopher, so we're tempted to believe we understand what we're talking about when we hold forth on the Trinity.

As I said, I think it is not humanly possible to understand the Trinity in its depth and subtlety. It IS possible, though, to confess our ignorance, and live out our lack

of understanding in positive ways. What I'm saying is that while thinking on the Trinity, it is possible to have an "ah HAH" moment springing from no less than the Holy Spirit. All of that is to confess that at the picnic last Sunday, I had just such an epiphany. I had an "Ah HAH" experience that I must confess to you. I was looking at all the smiling faces and thinking about these ten wonderful years I have spent with you, and I became sad and ashamed. This was a miraculous gathering of people who had no real need for free food, but who came together to eat their fill of a community knit together by a not particularly well documented two thousand year old story. I thought of the power of that story to reach people over so great a period of time and space, then I thought about standing before you each Sunday dressed as a 15th Century Geneva businessman and going on about things beyond human understanding

as if I understood them. I heard the words of Psalm 8,

4 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,

5 What is man that you should be mindful of him?

and I felt nothing but shame. What business did I have doing so outlandish a thing? Basking in your good graces, I mutter on about mysteries like the Trinity, and I'm lying to you if I pretend to understand that which I do not understand. I'm a fraud.

As I realized the depth of my ignorance and sin, I grew more and more ashamed. I took out my phone and sent a quick message to Rev. Lon Oliver, my teacher and mentor. The exchange read:

“I’m convinced that I have as much business teaching about God as you have doing a high wire act in the circus.”

Lon replied,

“If not you, who? For some reason, it seems to please God that any knowledge we might discern about our Creator must come from that which God created. Rocks, trees, oceans, rivers, animals and yes, human beings. And while birds and trees can teach us about God it would seem the best teachers are human beings since we alone have been created in God’s image. So, you may not feel up to the task of teaching about God but – tag! You’re it.

“If not you, who?” Lon’s words rang around in my head like a fire bell. In an instant, I confessed to myself, and to God, and now to you, that I am utterly unsuited to the job I have undertaken, unqualified, a fraud. But Lon’s reply was that despite my ignorance, I am called to speak to things I do not in any way understand. I was humbled, healed and hallowed by Lon’s last words, “Tag – you’re it”.

Confucius taught, “Real knowledge is to know the ex-

tent of one's ignorance." The Trinity is beyond human understanding. The only appropriate response to the Trinity is to stand before this great, central mystery of our faith and confess our limitations. By myself, and my words, I might make a go of this for a time, but eventually, there would have to be an accounting – a confession of my unworthiness. I had that epiphany at the picnic, and in the agony of my realization, the words that came to me were these:

And remember, I am with you always,
to the end of the age.

Those five words, "I am with you always", change everything. I understood, from Lon's "tag – you're it" and from the words of the Scriptures that if I am careful to stay out of the way, the Holy Spirit may speak to you through me. God and you help me to stay out of the way.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

And God's church said, "AMEN"

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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