

Thoughts on the Trinity

Parting Thoughts: Part 1 “Thoughts on the Trinity”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – May 26th 2024

Trinity Sunday

Readings: Isaiah 63:7-16; Galatians 2:15-3:5; John 1:1-18

Reflection: Psalm 29

Greeting: Praise the Lord, all you nations! Worship him, all you peoples! Because God’s faithful love toward us is strong, the Lord’s faithfulness lasts forever! Praise the Lord!

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for your presence with us day by day. We thank you for watching over us as our Heavenly Father, keeping us in your steadfast love and faithfulness. We thank you for the gift of your Son, our savior and the gift of eternal life that we find in your grace. We thank you for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, helping us to seek truth and gain wisdom. We pray that we may always seek your peace and to share your love with one another. Help us to celebrate the hope that we have because you are with us forever and always, and it is in Jesus’ name we pray this day. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 29

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy splendor. The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over mighty waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon skip like a calf and Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl and strips the forest bare, and in his temple all say, “Glory!” The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever. May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!
(Psalm 29 NRSV*)

We read the words of Psalm 29 and hear of God’s strength and glory. We hear of seeking help from the Lord that we may find peace. Do you think about the different aspects of the Trinity when you turn to God in prayer? How do you seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit? What are the ways that you depend on the support of our Heavenly Father? How do you share the peace of Christ with others? Who will you be lifting up in your prayers this week? How can we join together in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to share in the love we find?

Prayer: Everlasting God, you have revealed yourself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and ever live and reign in the perfect unity of love. Help us to experience your love each and every day. We turn to you now with the joys and the concerns that we bring before you this day. May you grant us comfort and guidance in all things. We lift up our celebrations that we have spoken before you. We lift up the concerns that we share together. We also bring before you the silent troubles and triumphs that we hold within. We pray that we experience your grace and mercy in our laughter and our tears and that you are with us in sorrow and rejoicing. Grant that we may always hold firm and joyfully to this faith, and may we be one with you, who are three persons in one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Isaiah chapter 63, verse 7 through 16.

I will recount the gracious deeds of the Lord, the praiseworthy acts of the Lord, because of all that the Lord has done for us and the great favor to the house of Israel that he has shown them according to his mercy, according to the abundance of his steadfast love. For he said, "Surely they are my people, children who will not act deceitfully," and he became their savior in all their distress. It was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them; in his love and pity it was he who redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved his holy spirit; therefore he became their enemy; he himself fought against them. Then they remembered the days of old, of Moses his servant. Where is the one who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? Where is the one who put within them his holy spirit, who caused his glorious arm to march at the right hand of Moses, who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name, who led them through the depths? Like a horse in the desert, they did not stumble. Like cattle that go down into the valley, the spirit of the Lord gave them rest. Thus you led your people, to make for yourself a glorious name. Look down from heaven and see, from your holy and glorious habitation. Where are your zeal and your might? Your great pity and your compassion are withheld from me. For you are our father, though Abraham does not know us and Israel does not acknowledge us; you, O Lord, are our father; our Redeemer from of old is your name. (Isaiah 63:7-16 NRSVUE)*

Our next reading is from Galatians chapter 2, verse 15 through chapter 3 verse 5.

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not gentile sinners, yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through the faith of Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law. But if, in our effort to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ,

and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing. You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so much for nothing?—if it really was for nothing. Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law or by your believing what you heard? (Galatians 2:15-3:5 NRSVUE)*

Our final reading is from John chapter 1, verse 1 through 18.

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 came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known. (John 1:1-18 NRSVUE)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

I wanted to give a little bit of an introduction for this series, because it will be my last series here with you. There is no overarching theme other than the fact that these are things I was thinking about. These are my parting thoughts. With this being Trinity Sunday, I thought it would be nice to take a look at Trinity. This is not always an easy concept to grasp. And I think it's because the concept itself is not meant to be simple. I mainly say this because I think it's the complexity of the concept that allows it to have the depth that it does. That we could think of the Trinity as something simple, but I think the truth is that it is a rather deep concept and has been deep from the beginning. The other part that may throw us off is that the Trinity is not explicitly defined within scripture. We do not get a deep theological take explaining the three distinct parts of the Trinity and how they relate to the whole. We do get some idea of what each role is, but there's also a lot of overlap and I think that's natural. The Trinity is three aspects of God, all of them being God and all of them being separate. I think this gives us different ways to understand and relate to God. I think this gets complicated because of the way that there is

overlap. But I don't see this as a problem as these are three ways to think about God. It gives us a frame of reference to understand God. But because our own frame of reference can vary from person to person, I think these ideas can sometimes cause confusion. I thought I would do my best to give a brief overview of the Trinity to understand how we can understand and experience these three aspects of one God.

Our readings today were chosen to help give us an insight into these different ideas of God. When we hear from Isaiah we hear about God as Father. We see a father's compassion, a father's protection, and a father's guidance. It gives us a very strong idea of God as a parental figure. Part of that is because parents can see when their children are struggling and when they're failing and help to get them back on the right course because of a parent's love for the child. When we think about God as a Heavenly Father, we think about the kind of love that we experience from a caring parent with our best interest at heart. In Galatians, we hear about Christ the Son. The Son of God who helps us relate to the father. The Son who is our friend, the Son who gives himself up for our sake. That his crucifixion helps us in relating to God the Father and the Holy Spirit. The role of the Son can be seen as this connecting presence. That the Son is our friend and our advocate, someone who is always on our side who can understand our experience completely. Not in a way that God the Father would though. Because a parent is always a parent, while the Son can be a friend. And I think that's one of the big differences that we see here. When we see Christ as a friend who understands and has experienced exactly what it means to be human in the world, we relate on a different level. Because we think of someone who knows our pains. Sometimes I think about this like I might one of my siblings. That I may think of my parents as the people who raised me, as the people who taught me right from wrong, as the people who are always looking out for my best interest. Whereas my siblings are the people that experienced growing up with me, that know what it's like to have grown up in the situation that we did. They experienced all of the struggles and the growth with me, not watching over me but being there with me in the moment. And there's a difference in the way that we interact because we are siblings, we are friends, and we are together in that way in that place. And it's a different kind of bond. I think that's what we see in our relationship with Christ as the Son of God. As the Son we have that friend relationship and there's that idea of being right there with us, not over us but with us. Now, Galatians also mentions the Holy Spirit, a spirit supplied by God to help us to understand the world we are in. And I think the Holy Spirit is probably the hardest part of this to define. The Holy Spirit is referred to as he or they in most of Scripture. But I have to be honest, I often end up using the term it, not because of any lessening of the Holy Spirit but because of the otherness that the Spirit can bring. I also think it can help to differentiate between the aspects of God. Especially since we see the Spirit in various forms, such as a dove or flaming tongues. I think part of that is the nebulous idea of the Spirit. We can hear how all of this comes together in our gospel reading from the opening of John's gospel. And one of the things I wanted to look at is the way the Holy Spirit delivers us truth and guidance. That the Spirit helps us to clarify what we want to say helps us to connect. While we have a very personal relationship with Christ, we make a

lot of our connections through the Holy Spirit, helping us to see and to communicate more clearly. We can look back to last week with Pentecost to remember everything there that we discussed about the Holy Spirit as well.

We hear about these aspects with the way John talks about the Word. That the Word was God, and the Word was with God with all things coming into being through the Word. That the Word becomes flesh and lives among us as the glory of a father's only son. John doesn't mention the Holy Spirit directly in this section, but the Spirit is there. When we think about the Holy Spirit, it is the aspect that can help us relate to all aspects of God. That the Holy Spirit is there as our spiritual guide to help us to pray, to help us to learn, and to help us to grow. We hear of how Christ is there as the Son of God to help us to relate to God the Father, but the truth of Christ is revealed to us through the Holy Spirit. In John we hear about creation and the way that Christ the Son helps us to relate to all of creation, but also there to comfort us and to lift us up to give us hope. And I think all of these things come together to give us a full picture of God. Because when we come back to it all, what we come back to is one God. One God who shares all of these aspects, all of these different ways that we relate. All of these different ideas that we have help us to make sense of God in our own minds. Because God is a large concept for us to handle. Often when I think about God as our heavenly Father, I think about all of creation. And it makes me think about being a little kid and thinking of all the grand things my parents did that I could not quite fathom because I was only a child. But they helped to prepare me for the world, and I looked up to them with reverence and awe. And I learned something important from my parents about how to live, how to care for one another, what it means to be supportive when someone else is in your care, and how to love unconditionally. I think about with God as our Father. And so, when I then think about Jesus the Son, as the Word made flesh, as the one who gives up his life for a friend, I think of a different aspect of God. I think of companion, someone who is right there with me like a sibling or a close friend. Someone that is there to help me when I stumble. Someone I can confide in, to share my biggest fears or my most secret hopes. That Christ the Son is the person I turn to and I bring my prayers in his name because he's the one that I feel knows me best. And when I think about the Holy Spirit, I might think about a tutor or a guide, being in charge of making sure that I don't lose my way. That the Spirit is making sure that I learn what I need to know and is helping me figure out the words I should use. The Spirit helps me to listen to what is on my heart and translating it so that others can understand. A presence that makes me better so that I can learn, and I can grow as a person. The Spirit is someone who brings out the best in me. When I think about those three combined, I can see them overlap. And that is OK. Because there may be overlap because of how we interact, but also because they are still of one God. I can see reaching out to God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit in different ways that may sometimes feel the same. But when I address each one, it is often because of what is on my heart and mind. When I think about just one aspect of the Trinity, it helps me to focus on what is happening in my life and what it is I need. It helps me to figure out how to bring it to God in a way that is meaningful and expresses my innermost feelings. That is the importance of the Trinity. It isn't that the Trinity

needs to be clearly defined, but that I can relate to each aspect to have a deeper connection to God through all three. It makes it easier for me to bring my prayers before the Lord because at the end of the day, as long as I am turning to God, that is what truly matters. Because I know that God in whatever form we think of is still there to help us. That our redeemer and our salvation is there. That we will always have hope, and that we will always find love when we seek the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Parting Thoughts

My last sermon series is going to be a series of parting thoughts. This will cover a handful of different topics and isn't going to be quite like other sermon series that I've done. We will look at various theological points and the way that we live our faith. Before I go, I'll leave you with a few parting thoughts about various subjects. But know that I leave with a thankful heart.

Prayer List

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Marsha Overton
Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox	Taylor Waldorf
Harriet Tucker	Marlene Kincaid	Cara Dillier	Peggy Farley
Mandy Schumacher	Ann McMorris	Marci Cutts Smith	Jaydelyn Brassard
Pat Hayden Titus	Devona Dittamore	Nancy McElravy	Marie R.
Connie Brown	Thelma Ball	Stephanie Strewsbury	John Graves
Cathleen Carl	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Larry Thompson
Greg Williams	Jim & Kay Wells	Earl Sparks	

Rev Camron D St. Michael

<https://stmichael.pw>

cdstmichael@outlook.com

(316)530-3182 (call or text)

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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