

SECOND READING: Matthew 28:16-20

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

This is the word of the Lord **Thanks be to God**

PSALM: Psalm 8 (*responsively*)

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

You have set your glory above the heavens.

Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;

what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals¹ that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,

all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

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

This is the word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

“Dancing with the Divine”

Have you ever tried to take a walk with a 2 year old? Well, if you have the chance to do so, do it. It is such fun. Recently, we’ve enjoyed some walks with our 2 yr old grandson, Alex. And I’ve come to observe that what makes the experience so wonderful is that a 2 year old’s attention span is short and this allows them to notice things...lots of things. For instance, Alex might see a penny on the ground and stop to pick it up, and while doing that, he sees a little bug. And when his little fingers disturb the bug and it flies up into the sky above him, he notices a tree, and he comments on its leaves blowing in the wind, and then the bird that is hopping from branch to branch captures his attention. Look! Bird! The bird reminds him of some little song he knows about animals which he begins to sing as he runs along until he notices his shadow, the one preceding him on the sidewalk. He begins going backwards to make his shadow elongate and forward to make it shorter, that is, until he notices a puddle which he just has to stomp in and then exclaim, “wet”! Yes, a two year old notices things....things that we so often do not...things which are in reality, testimony to God’s presence, to God’s acts in our world. He is too young to know, of course, but Alex is testifying to God’s character that has always been with us and will be with us till the end of the age. As theologian Karl Barth said, “God is known to us in God’s acts.”¹

Ok, so let’s back up and place this discussion in the framework of the doctrine which we discuss on the Sunday following Pentecost, one foundational to our Faith, one that matters deeply to us and has been passionately fought over. That is, the doctrine of the Trinity. It is a uniquely Christian doctrine, and “our salvation is bound up with it”,² yet it flies under the radar for many of us, primarily out of our fear that it too difficult to understand, let alone explain.

However, brothers and sisters, the Trinity is simply our belief that God makes Godself known to us in more than one way. As Rev. Sue Eaves says, “*It isn’t enough for us to say*

¹Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of the Word of God* II/1, pp. 257– 72. Barth’s actualism is well- documented in secondary literature; see Paul Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth’s Ethical Vision*(London: T & T Clark, 2007), pp. 4– 12

² Justin Taylor. “*Our Salvation is bound up with the doctrine of the Trinity*”. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/our-salvation-is-bound-up-with-the-doctrine-of-the-trinity/> (accessed 6-1-23).

*that we experience God in only one way. We know there is more to God than that!*³ Despite the fact that words are never adequate, we hold that God is known by and comes to us in three ways.... as three persons/alities...Father, Son, Holy Spirit....Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer....Speaker, Word, Breath...Presence, Protector, Provocateur...Lover, Beloved, Love...One from whom, One through Whom, One in Whom...the naming can go on.

We believe God is the One who made us and has come to us as Jesus the Christ, and who, in turn, continues to act in the world for us to see, feel, taste, smell and hear each day through the Spirit. *Repeat.* Gregory of Nazianzus, said in the 4th c, *“We cannot think of the one God without quickly being encircled by the splendor of the three persons; nor can we look around in our world and discern the three without being straightway carried back to the one.”*⁴ Yes, we know God, the 1, by and in 3 distinct ways or person/alities. The persons are not three gods, but are the same in substance, in nature. They exist in a divine fellowship, an eternal relationship, dancing so to speak, a holy dance (*a perichoresis*). Daniel Migliore says, *“They dance, encircling around each other, encompassing each one in the other, always incomparably hospitable to each other,”*⁵ They *“permeate one another so completely that one is always in the other two and the other two in the one.”*⁶ In their dancing, Rev. Rebekah LoMen imagines, *“they promise that none of them will let go, and they lean back just far enough that they are all supporting and being supported at the same time.”* Sometimes they lean more to one and sometimes more to another. *“Sometimes they spin, gripping tightly to one another, knowing that the exhilaration of this union comes from the fact that none of them could do it if the others weren’t with them.”*⁷

So, this is the foundation of our Trinitarian doctrine. But you might be thinking about now, not only, what has this to do with the 2 year old, but what different does it make?...what difference does this really make? You might be thinking, “I’m struggling with health issues,”

³ Sue Eaves. *We Don’t Know Much*. [https://asermonforeverysunday.com/sermons/c29-trinity-Sundy-year-c-2019/\(accessed](https://asermonforeverysunday.com/sermons/c29-trinity-Sundy-year-c-2019/(accessed) 6-11-19)

⁴Gregory of Nazianzus. (Institutes 1.13.17)

⁵Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 70.

⁶Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of the Word of God I/1*, 2nd ed, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 370.

⁷ Rebekah LeMon. *“Circle Up »*. <https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/645d1c376615f6e241000041/rebekah-lemon-circle-up>. (accessed 6-1-23).

“I’m worried about my children or my elderly parents,” “I’m afraid to turn on the news,” “I’m really ashamed with what I’ve done this week,” “I’m about to lose my job,” “I’m fighting with my spouse” “I don’t know what I’m going to do with my life.” How does all of this talk about dancing and eternal partnerships, about the oneness and threeness of God really make a difference to all my needs and the needs of the world?”

Well, friends, I’m here today to tell you that it actually does make a difference. It does. It makes a difference in how we live our lives.⁸ The 2 year old notices things, and if WE pay attention, if WE look around too and similarly discern the acts of the three, like Alex, and then find ourselves taken straightway to the One, if we can realize that our God is wondrously, mysteriously present in the ordinariness of our lives, in the beauty, but also the messiness of it all: the grass that grows under our feet and the sun that shines in our day, the food we eat, the drink we share, the work we do, the pain and sufferings we struggle with, the love we are given, the love we give away, the fears we face, the fears we hide from... if we first just simply notice that God is with us and for us in these things...well, we can live more grateful lives. This would be a good thing. This would be a good thing. And if this was the only take-away we have from the sermon today, well ok. But the difference that our understanding “the threeness and oneness of God” makes in how we live is actually greatly more than this too.

Friends, when we really pay attention and consider who it is that we are witnessing acting in our world, we realize that..... **God is extending God’s very self to be with us.** It is the triune God, not someone outside of God, but God, GOD, who is being made known, not fully, of course, since we cannot know God fully, but it is God truly....who has, since the beginning, **created**, delivered and made an eternal covenant with us, who has come as “the Word made flesh” to save us with his amazing grace, and who has blown life into us to transform us from fractured believers into his church. It is God. IT IS OUR GOD, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, who has been always working to gather this world unto Godself. And God has not done this out of some obligation, but because God loves US and desires to call US out of ourselves and shape

⁸ Cyndy Rigby. Personal Communication. Doctrine of God Class, Austin Theological Presbyterian Seminary. Jan 7, 2011

us to be people living abundant lives, overflowing with light, life and love. Yes, when we pay attention, really pay attention, we can live truly thankful lives, yes,.....and then...this is it....are you ready?....are you ready?...we can live **LIVES AS PARTICIPANTS IN THE DANCE OURSELVES!** We can live lives as participants in the dance ourselves! As Rev. David Lose says, “*When we talk about the Trinity as God 3 in 1, we really haven’t understood it, if we haven’t understood it as 3 in 1 plus 1 and that 1 is us!*”⁹

I have shared long ago a story that I find very helpful, ...I will tell it to you again as it has bearing. *Cyndy described herself as a young teenager full of a not atypical rebellious, independent spirit. One evening she was called to dinner and even though she noticed that her mother had made all her favorite foods, she waited until the last minute to come and then ate quietly, jaw set, without entering into any conversation with her family. When the meal was over, she properly asked to be excused and then stiffly did the dishes. When done she briskly walked back to her room, saying over her shoulder, “Thank you, mother, for the dinner.” Her mother quickly responded, “Cynthia, do not thank me for doing things for you. Do you not realize that you are a part of me? I am with you. I am for you. You are mine and I am yours.”*¹⁰ Needless to say, Cyndy’s perspective changed and how she functioned within the family was different from that moment on.

Brothers and sisters, through our embracing of the Trinity, we can live as full participants in the divine plan for the world, “taking part in the dance,” because, well, because we’re meant to. The God who has shown such steadfast love as to be with us and for us, has also claimed us. We belong to God and God belongs to us. Through Christ, we belong as adopted redeemed children and we are invited into the full relationship, the perichoresis, via communion with the Holy Spirit. This means that, as full participants in the dance, we are essential to the divine work. **We are essential to the divine work in the world.** Staggering! And what’s more, God does not want our thank you notes as much as God wants our engagement as a community, in a

⁹ David Lose. “*Three in One Plus One.*” In the Meantime. <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/05/54ini5y-b-tree-in-one-plus-one/> (accessed 5-27-15).

¹⁰ Cyndy Rigby. Personal Communication. Doctrine of God Class, Austin Theological Presbyterian Seminary. Jan 7, 2011.

relationship ourselves, one which values each other and responds to the needs of the world in confidence, hope, and love.

So those things we mentioned before that you might be sitting here and struggling with...health issues, worries about family and job, the conflicts and brokenness in and around you?well, know that as a community we are here to come alongside each other and offer listening ears, forgiving hearts, and arms to support each other. We can be companions to fight the fight, to encourage, to pray and praise God together. And we, as claimed participants in the divine dance, can go out to invite the world to circle up, to join in, and together sing, *“Holy, Holy, Holy, Merciful and Mighty, God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity.”* Today may we begin to live life differently. May it be so. Amen and Amen.