

The Festival of the Holy Trinity with the Rite of Confirmation for Chloe Hackbart and Jocelyn Reif  
7 June, Anno Domini 2020  
St. John 3:1-17  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the most Blessed and Holy Trinity - Father, +Son, and Holy Spirit.

Today, as we consider the astounding reality that we know what the angels know, as we confess the beautiful simplicity and complexity of the Athanasian Creed, let us ponder that the identity of God is grounded in relationship and community. Three persons in the one Godhead. This is a profoundly important truth for us as we look around and see so much division and unrest in our nation. As those created in God's image, we were not created to be biting and tearing at one another like rabid dogs. Our relationships with one another are badly broken. Our communities are splintered. The only way to heal these is to rightly understand our connection to the relationship of the Trinity.

“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” There is only one God. But Holy Scripture makes clear that He is not alone. There is a divine “Us” that makes man in “Our” image. There is the Trinity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. And there is perfect Unity in this Trinity. As the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church has always confessed - “in this Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another; but the whole three persons are coeternal with each other and coequal, so that in all things, as has been stated above, the Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity is to be worshiped.” This is the one true God and none other.

And, if God is love, then the relationship of the Father to the Son to the Holy Spirit must be one of love. Love demands a beloved. Therefore within Himself, the love of God finds perfect expression as the Father loves the Son loves the Holy Spirit loves the Father. And that love is ordered and defined and purposeful. Though the persons of the Trinity are coequal and their majesty coeternal, yet “the Father is not made nor created nor begotten by anyone. The Son is neither made nor created, but begotten of the Father alone. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son, neither made nor created nor begotten, but proceeding.” The relationship of the persons of the Trinity is not random or chaotic but ordered by love. There is a perfect unity of will and action. Jesus attests to this truth throughout His ministry saying “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30) Elsewhere Jesus speaks of the Spirit of Truth, whom the Father would send in His Name.

The relationship of the Trinity is a relationship of love, a relationship of self-giving, and a relationship of creating. Life is the product of divine love. Thus God created man in His own image, not to serve God but to be the recipient of God's love. But, as we have pointed out numerous times, for man to be created in the image of God meant that Adam couldn't just be there alone. Adam, to be like God, needed a beloved to love. So God

created Eve from Adam, bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, of one substance with Adam and yet distinct from him. And they loved one another which meant that they were each solely concerned about the good and benefit of the other rather than themselves. They gave the entirety of themselves to one another and in so doing, that love, as God's, brought forth more life upon which to bestow love. This is the building block upon which all of man's relationships are to be built - the self-giving, life-creating love of God. God created us to enjoy perfect harmony with Him and with one another. Indeed, to be in perfect harmony with God is to be in perfect harmony with one another. To hate that which God Himself created, no matter how unworthy of love that creation is, is to hate God Himself. Thus the apostle writes "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God who he has not seen."

We are to love **as God loves**. Not differently or less. Our love is to be the love that we see shining brightly from the crucified Jesus who laid down His life to save us - His enemies who murdered Him. That is the essence of the 10 Commandments. Every commandment of God is about a relationship of love. If you do not do these things you love neither God nor your neighbor. The first three establish what perfect love of God looks like - to hold God as your highest and only good, to call upon His Name in faith for every need, and to treasure absolutely nothing more highly than the Word of God and devote our lives to hearing and learning it because it is life. Commandments four through ten, no less rooted in the very identity of God Himself, establish how it is that we love one another, what our relationship to one another is to look like. Every commandment drives us to seek the good of our neighbor - in thought, in word, and in action. You can't simply leave your neighbor alone. That is not love. Love actively seeks the well-being of your neighbor above your own.

That is what is so wrong in the world. We simply do not love one another. Ever since Adam turned his love away from God and Eve and onto himself, men have hated one another and sought their own advantage at one another's cost. Cain killed Abel and it never stopped. Now husbands seek to dominate their wives, children rebel against their parents, those in authority seek to subject those whom they serve, and citizens seek to throw off the authority which God has established. And none of us can claim innocence. Every ounce of anger, every grudge, every back-biting loveless word which pours out of our hearts is responsible for the chaos and murder and hatred and rebellion we see on TV. All of us collectively need to repent and seek the Lord's mercy and pray that our relationships may be healed - starting in our own homes and moving out in our communities. What we are witnessing is the fruit of disordered love and disordered relationships. We will fix nothing by pointing the finger at our televisions and blaming everyone else. The only proper answer to is confess our own sins of loveless toward God and our neighbor. And having confessed, receiving the Holy Absolution of Christ who in His perfect love for His Father and for the sinful world, has poured out His precious Blood to atone for our hatred of Him and each other.

This is the beauty of the true Christian faith. God, in Christ, has provided for the restoration of our relationship to Him and, in turn, with one another. The true love of God meant that what He created He would not abandon. Instead, He would redeem it, though that redemption would cost Him His dearest treasure - His only begotten Son. But the Son rejoiced in this will of His Father because they are of one will. "Yes, Father, yes, most willingly I'll bear what You command Me. All this I gladly suffer." (LSB 438, stz. 1,3) We could never restore this relationship. No work of ours, however holy and good it may seem, is sufficient. This is what befuddled Nicodemus. Dr. Luther wrote in his postil on this text that Nicodemus "praises Christ as a good man; Christ in turn accosts him saying: 'And you are a bad man.'" (Luther, 427) All of us must be born again, from above, of water and the Spirit. Sinful flesh only gives birth to more sinful flesh. Our relationship with God from the moment we are conceived is an adversarial one. That's what the Ten Commandments clearly show. We have not kept them. We have severed ourselves from God every time we live selfishly according to our own desires, every time we have lived as if God did not matter and as if we mattered most, every time we have hurt and failed to help our neighbor.

We must be born again. We must be given a different life. The spirit of Satan, the spirit of the flesh, must be driven out. We must be drawn up out of the death of sin and made alive by God. That is exactly what Baptism is. You are bad and God makes you good by declaring you to be so. Jocelyn and Chloe, you were bad. But God has made you good in the waters of Holy Baptism. That is what you are confirming today as you confess faith in the Holy Trinity. You aren't simply saying "I believe there is a god." You are proclaiming before the whole world that the one, true, Triune God - the Father, the +Son, and the Holy Spirit - has given you the new birth of water and the Spirit, that by your Baptism you were crucified and buried with Christ and therefore you have also been raised with Christ to newness of life. You, along with all the Baptized, have been brought back into a right relationship with God so that you address Him as Father. You have been given the Holy Spirit who gives you true and eternal life as He proclaims to you the things of Christ and nourishes you as you continue by God's grace to remain steadfast in this confession and Church, hearing the Word of your God and receiving faithfully the Supper which Christ instituted for the strengthening of your faith.

But beware. You will be tempted on every side. The devil will work feverishly to draw you away from the very means by which God saves and keeps you. He will work to tamp down your hunger and need for the things of Christ. He knows that without them, the faith that burns brightly today, can't survive. We will pray for you and support you in every way we know how. The world will work to undermine your faith and trust in the Word of God. And even your own flesh will resist and seek to rebel against Christ. Heed the voice of your faithful parents and grandparents, your brothers and sisters in Christ, and your pastors all whom God has graciously given you to support you and keep you in His dear family, the Church. You are surrounded by angels and archangels, the whole

company of heaven and the whole Church on earth who with one mighty voice lift up loud shouts of praise and thanksgiving for the mercy God has shown you in giving you life and drawing you into the community of faith. We rejoice to feast with you at Christ's table as one family. At this table there is to be no anger or bitterness or division. We have been reconciled to God and to one another and are bound to one another by the Blood of God's only Son and the true confession of the God who has saved us. May God the Holy Spirit, by His grace, grant that all of us together keep the true faith whole and undefiled so that on the Last Day, we may be gathered together with the whole family of Christ to dwell together in our Father's house for all eternity.

In the Name of +Jesus.