

The Feast of the Holy Trinity
26 May, Anno Domini 2024
St. John 3:1-17

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

Nicodemus' head must have been spinning. What on earth was Jesus talking about? But that is only because he was expecting some kind of deep religious discussion or philosophical debate. Nicodemus thought he was coming to Jesus to have some questions answered by this teacher from God. Nicodemus probably thought that he was going to set Jesus straight. But Jesus loved Nicodemus too much for that. He wouldn't patronize Nicodemus' false belief that the kingdom of God was a set of propositions that he needed to assent to by the power of his will and his ability to understand. Jesus didn't come into the world to condemn Nicodemus but to save him. And in order to accomplish that Jesus first had to show Nicodemus that his own wisdom was utter foolishness and was, in fact, damning. Blinded by his devotion to legalism and a self-obtained righteousness, Nicodemus didn't see his need for the very thing Jesus had come to give - mercy and forgiveness.

That is the curse of man's God-given ability to learn about creation. Eventually, in our sin, we begin to believe that we are actually God, that we are infinitely capable of understanding everything and figuring everything out by ourselves. We arrogantly believe that nothing is impossible for us to accomplish or figure out. And, conversely, if we can't understand or explain it, if it doesn't fit within our tiny box of understanding, we arrogantly dismiss it as magic or superstition. Thus, the world spurns God, spurns His Word, spurns the miracles of Jesus, and dismisses as complete foolishness the idea that God would sacrifice His only-begotten Son to save sinners.

“Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater

of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" They must all be silenced at the foot of the cross where the sinless Son of God was nailed to the tree as the atoning sacrifice for our sin. "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" The things of our salvation are beyond comprehension. They are things that can only be received by faith. They are things that can only be received once the blinders of pride and self-delusion are removed. Nicodemus thought he knew who Jesus was. He thought the kingdom of God was well within his grasp. But he was blind. He couldn't see that the author of truth, that Truth itself and the wisdom of God was sitting in front of him.

This is why Jesus directs Nicodemus back to water and the Spirit. John had preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. But Nicodemus and his colleagues had refused because they saw no need for repentance. Besides, how could water do such great things? Nicodemus couldn't see the kingdom of God because the kingdom of God is precisely a kingdom of grace, where God snatches undeserving wretches like you and me from the fires of eternal judgment. It is a kingdom where the same waters that wash our souls clean, drenched Jesus in the filth of our sin. It is a kingdom where the innocent die for the guilty even while the guilty drive the nails through the guiltless hands and feet of their Savior.

That is a depth of wisdom that no man could ever attain, no philosopher or debater could ever imagine or reason their way to because it is completely contrary to everything our sinful flesh calls wisdom. It is the Spirit, blowing through the preaching of God's Word, who gives life to those who are crushed under the impossible guilt of their sin, who lie in dread of death because they know they have deeply grieved God. It is the water of Baptism, pouring out of the pierced side of Jesus, that purifies your consciences from dead, loveless works. It is the Second Person of the Blessed and Holy Trinity, sent by God the Father, who beholds your weakness, and rather than turning aside from it in disgust, willingly stoops down into the ditch and bears it.

Repent. This kingdom is not one you will ever figure out or get yourself into. You will not reason your friends into it. It can only be received in faith and the gift of faith comes only by Spirit through the Word. And while you may not understand where the wind comes from or where it is going, the Spirit is not so mysterious. Wherever Christ crucified for you is preached, the Spirit is blowing. Wherever Holy Baptism is administered according to Christ's own institution and treasured as a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit is blowing. Wherever the Body and Blood of Jesus are administered according to Christ's Word and treasured as the very source of life and peace, under the bread and wine for us Christian's to eat and drink, the Spirit is blowing, breathing into our bodies and souls the breath of life once again.

The truly great mystery that we celebrate today isn't that God is three distinct persons in one indivisible Godhead, though that is a true and wonderful mystery that no one can fully wrap his head around. Rather, it is that this Triune God has lovingly and willingly taken on our sinful flesh and paid the terrible price for our sin against Him. He has borne the full punishment for our loveless words and actions, our bitterness and envy, our doubting and outright despising of His Word and gifts, our prayer-less days. That is a mystery beyond all telling. God forgives sinners. "How unsearchable are his judgment and how inscrutable his ways!" It is for this reason that we take up the Sanctus of the angels as we prepare to receive from the altar the very Lamb of God who takes away our sins, who touches His Body and Blood to our lips and says to you "your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for."

May you find joy and peace in the mystery of the Holy Trinity who has redeemed you.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.