

# Sermon: Trinity Sunday

The Rev. Mike Wernick

May 27, 2018

Year B  
Isaiah 6:1-8  
Psalm 29  
Romans 8:12-17  
John 3:1-17

I know what you're thinking... that is... if you've looked ahead in the bulletin... *O no... not the Athanasian Creed... I hate that Creed... it's so long... and repetitive... and it makes no sense whatsoever... who the heck ever wrote it... O... Athanasius...* but there it is... part of our common history... in the Book of Common Prayer... and in the ELW's predecessor... the Lutheran Book of Worship... it's the first Creed in which the equality of the three persons of the Trinity is explicitly stated...

Athanasius was born about 295 in Alexandria... and was ordained deacon in 319... he attracted attention by his opposition to Arius... a priest who denied the full divinity of Jesus... which is at least partly why the Nicene Creed says that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son...

In one of his more famous works... he writes... "The Savior of us all... the Word of God... in his great love... took to himself a body... and moved as Man among men... meeting their senses... so to speak... half way... he became himself an object for the senses... so that those who were seeking God in sensible things... might apprehend the Father through the works which he did in the body..."

The Creed he wrote is an attempt to make sense of the incomprehensible... just as we sometimes attempt to make sense of why people love us... when we may sometimes feel unlovable... that kind of incomprehensible... so when we read it... if you're able... don't analyze... read it as poetry... read it as a love poem...

Most of you know that voting members Jill... and Rich... and I just attended Synod Assembly... and at the final Eucharist on Tuesday morning... Bp. Satterlee preached...

and when a former preaching professor preaches... you listen... you know it's going to be a good sermon... and you know you're going to want to share... at least some of it...

Bp. Satterlee said that he's been asked by Confirmation students... about how much he gets paid... and he said that his wife Kathy puts \$20.00 on his dresser every week... he said that he gets asked about who his boss is... and since Presiding Bp. Elizabeth Eaton was sitting right behind him... he turned and pointed at her... and he said that he was asked whether he could fire a pastor if the congregation wanted him to... he cannot... questions he said... about his worth... and his rank... and his authority...

And he said that it's with these criteria... that many of us evaluate others... or the world... and many of us value... or want to associate... with those who have a high net worth... and a high rank... and far reaching authority... but yet... he said... we are still drawn... almost irresistibly... to infants... [like William over there...] and maybe kittens and puppies... who have no worth... no rank... and no authority...

So when do we start imposing these three criteria... how do they creep into our relationships... into the decisions we make... into how we evaluate others and other situations... and with whom we want to associate ourselves... there's really nothing that a three-month-old infant can do for us... so when does that become inadequate...

At Synod Assembly... there was one voting member who was in a motorized cart... no wait... there were two... there were two voting members in wheelchairs... no wait... there were three voting members in wheelchairs... and one of them had no legs... there was one voting member who's left arm had been amputated... and there was one voting member who's legally blind... O wait... that's the bishop... people who by the world's standards may have less worth... or rank... or authority... but who were co-equal in the eyes of Synod Assembly... whose vote counted no more and no less... than everyone else's...

Today's Gospel is used today... because it represents this co-equal status... it reveals God in three persons... God the Creator... from whom the Christ has come... God the Redeemer... who proceeded from the divine and was made flesh in human form... and God the Spirit... who is the agent of transformation and new birth... as Jesus said to Nicodemus...

The Rev. Mike Kinman... Rector of All Saint's Pasadena wrote... as a Pharisee... Nicodemus believes that God's special affections are reserved for God's chosen people... the Jews... Jesus explodes that... and this explosion is made clear in one of the most quoted passages in all of Christian scripture... *Yes... God so loved the world... as to give the Only Begotten One... that whoever believes may not die... but have eternal life...* God so loved THE WORLD... that's every person who's been born or will be... and the creation itself... though it's human nature to assume... or hope... that we are special in God's eyes... and many Christians use John 3:16 as a proof text for God's preferential option for Christians... but what John 3:16 should drive us to... is to our knees... in humility... in a world that is full of diversity... conflict... disparity... injustice... and on and on and on... the one common denominator is that God loves THE WHOLE WORLD... how can we conceive of that kind of love... how can we participate in that kind of love... if the whole world is God's beloved... what does that mean for how I live in... and with... the world...

And as Professor Thomas Long wrote... the world that God loves is not the world of delightful music... and literature... and art... the world of carefree laughter tinkling on the verandas of the privileged... but Nicodemus' world... the underbelly world of night... the God-hating world of violence... torture... rebellion... and sin...

Professor Long recounted another pastor's story... of a two-year old's baptism... at which the stated pronouncement was read... *You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism... and marked as Christ's own forever...* Unexpectedly... the child responded... "Uh-oh."

Uh-oh... is an appropriate theological response... considering that with Nicodemus... we are out in a stormy sea... like Nicodemus and the Pharisees... we think we've got it all figured out... but the waves are too high... and the winds are too strong... and we cannot convince ourselves that we are out for a leisurely swim... we thought our way into danger but we cannot think our way to safety... we worked our way down but we cannot work our way up... though Jesus' searchlight reveals two wonderful things... we are in trouble... and he has come to save us...

Nicodemus thought he was the one coming to Jesus at night... only to discover that in the cosmic scheme of things... Jesus came to him... and to all of humanity... Jesus came in the flesh... sent by God... not to condemn... and certainly not to engage us in polite theological discourse... but to save...

The Athanasian Creed puts to rest... any notion that any one Person of the Trinity... is any more than any other Person of the Trinity... the three share co-eternal equality... they are engaged in an eternal dance of love... none fear loss... not one of them lords anything over the other... not one of them brags about their accomplishments... not one of them tries to take their differences and leverage them into being... better... than... so how do we transfer this mutuality... to the world... in a way that does away with worth... and rank... and authority...

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