

I Believe In The Triune God.

Text: John 3:1-15

1) I believe in God the Father

Suggested Hymns:

2) I believe in God the Son

140, 437, 141, 142, 532

3) I believe in God the Holy Spirit

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 3:1-15, ¹ *There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.* ² *This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.”*

³ *Jesus answered and said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* ⁴ *Nicodemus said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”*

⁵ *Jesus answered, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.* ⁶ *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* ⁷ *“Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”* ⁸ *“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”*

⁹ *Nicodemus answered and said to Him, “How can these things be?”* ¹⁰ *Jesus answered and said to him, “Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?”* ¹¹ *“Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.*

¹² *“If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”* ¹³ *“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.* ¹⁴ *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,* ¹⁵ *“that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Some time ago a man who was a member of one of the largest Protestant denominations in the world remarked, *“I don’t know what’s the matter with our minister, but recently he told us that we don’t have to say the Apostles’ Creed any more.”*

The fact of the matter was that this man’s pastor was a so-called liberal in theology; that is, one who no longer believes in those ancient cardinal doctrines of Christianity taught by Christ and His Apostles and embodied in the Apostles’ Creed.

Today, let us take special note of the importance of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The foundation of the great creeds of Christendom is the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Does it make any difference whether we believe in the Trinity or not? We would answer that question in this way: The doctrine of the Triune God is not a doctrine invented by any Church, but a clear teaching of Scripture.

We need here only to recall the familiar words of our Lord to His disciples in Matthew 28:19, ¹⁹ *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.* (Note, not names, but name.)

This passage, together with similar passages, plus the incident of the manifestation of the three Persons of the Trinity at the baptism of Jesus; plus the fact that all three Persons are by the Scriptures called God, and that to each Person is ascribed divine works, divine names, divine honour and glory, move us to believe that God is the Triune God: three distinct Persons in one divine Being. That is the true God.

Any conception of God other than this is idolatrous. And an idol created by man’s imagination is just as much an idol as one made with his hands. Does it make any difference whether we believe in the Triune God or not? Does it make any difference whether we worship the true God or an idol? Answer the second question, and you have answered the first question also.

On this Trinity Sunday, then, we wish to reaffirm our faith in the Triune God. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. “I Believe In God The Father.”

To the inquiring Nicodemus, a respected member of the Jewish council, who came to Jesus by night, the Lord declared, ***“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”***

Man is God’s creature. The word born, at once suggests to us the mystery of life. Now, it would be of little value to our discussion if we referred to the many strange theories of the origin of life, proposed by men to replace the Biblical account of creation — which seems outlandish to them!

Rather we should turn directly to God’s Word, as we read in Genesis 2:7, ***“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”*** Not another animal; not a mere bundle of nerves and muscles, not a mere “machine,” but a rational being possessing an immortal soul. Man comes from God. And as the first man, so every child that is born into the world is truly ***“a heritage from the Lord.”***¹

A minister’s little girl one day came home from school and said, *“Do you know people used to live up in trees like monkeys?”* *“Not your ancestors,”* replied her father. *“Your ancestors came down from God, not up from slime.”*

It is so important to know our beginnings. The Scriptural truth that man’s origin is from God gives to human personality and life its proper dignity; while opposing theories rob it of its rightful sanctity. If a human being is just a physical machine, the product of chance, then what is murder? It is just one “machine” putting another “machine” out of order.

What is robbery? It is merely “one machine” taking something away from another “machine.” Again, is it really possible to instil in a human being’s mind and heart anything noble, any love of fellow men, any loyalty, any honesty on the basis of an evolutionary ancestry? Certainly Not!

If we cut loose from the Creator, what becomes of human dignity, of the sanctity of life, of personal rights and obligations? Faith in God the Father, the Creator, is needed for the highest good of society. Of this the Prophet Malachi reminds us when he cries, ***Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us?***²

Our heavenly Father is also the Preserver of life. Warning His children against undue care and worry, which amounts to “little faith” in the kind providence of that Father, Jesus says in Matthew 6:25-26 & 32-33, ²⁵ ***“Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?”*** ²⁶ ***“Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”***

For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

This is important. The providence of the Father, so beautifully taught by our Lord, is at once a buoyant and comforting truth in our lives. We know that we are not the playthings of chance, but the beloved children of a heavenly Father who cares.

It is true, according to the Scripture, not the Father alone, but all three Persons were active in the work of creation. ***“The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters,”*** says Moses.³ ***“All things were made through [Jesus], and without Him nothing was made that was made,”*** declares John.⁴

Nevertheless, the grand work of creation is chiefly the work of the Father. ***“The Father has life in Himself,”*** affirms Jesus.⁵ The Father ***“made the worlds”*** through Christ, asserts the writer of Hebrews.⁶ Therefore we confess, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.”

2. “I Believe In God The Son.”

Man is created in God’s image. The Father surveyed all His majestic handiwork and pronounced it “very good.” Only of man is it said, ***“God created man in His own image.”***⁷ Nothing higher, nothing nobler than this could be said of man. For, according to St. Paul, this image of God consisted in nothing less than “knowledge”⁸ of God and ***“true righteousness and holiness.”***⁹ In that way man was like God. That was man in his highest, noblest state.

Then came the tragedy of the Fall. Man sinned, his garden of joy became a wilderness of sorrow! Death, physical and spiritual death, began to stalk the world.

By his sin man had separated himself from God; and apart from God there is only death, the wages of sin. Oh, yes, life, physical life, went on. Adam begat sons and daughters. But his first-born, Cain, slew his brother Abel in a fit of jealousy. The image of God in man was lost indeed!

Time only increased the ravages of sin. The Flood was God's judgement on mankind. And God's judgment of the human race is written in Ecclesiastes 7:20, ²⁰ ***For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.***

Our only hope is in God. Friends, it is clear, then, that if a person — any person — is to live again, to live with God forever, his only hope lies in God. There is nothing, utterly nothing, in man himself by which he might rise to that righteousness which God demands for fellowship with Him.

Jesus is our Hope. The coming of the Son of God in the flesh, however, is the ultimate proof that help has come from God, and that God has extended His mercy to lost mankind.

It is of this amazing love of God toward His rebellious children that the Son of God speaks to Nicodemus. See Jesus of whom Moses and all the Prophets testified, the Only-begotten of the Father, the Word made flesh — see Jesus on that late spring evening with His noted visitor, perhaps sitting out under the brilliant Palestinian sky. He is pointing out to Nicodemus that one lone road which leads into the kingdom of God.

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness” — it is a story from the ancient and glorious history of Israel, something Nicodemus knew and loved. The reference is to that occasion when God, wearied and angered by Israel's murmurings against Him, ***“sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.”***¹⁰ Then, when the transgressors repented, Moses at God's command set upon a pole a serpent of brass. All those bitten who looked at that raised serpent were saved. Those who refused to look perished.

“Even so,” the Lord continues, ***“must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ “that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”*** The serpent on the pole was a type, illustration or example of Christ’s own death on the cross for the sin of all people! Thus, in the stillness of the night, Nicodemus heard from the Saviour’s own lips that precious truth that He had come to atone for man’s sin and that all who would look upon Him with eyes of faith as their Redeemer would live again, forever. Do you see Jesus in this way?

It has been well said that “The distinction between Christianity and all other systems of religion consists largely in this, that in these others, men are found seeking after God, while Christianity is God seeking after men.”¹¹

See in Christ the “seeking” God. He comes to seek and to save those who are lost. A Chinese convert is said to have expressed that truth in this way: “A man fell into a deep pit, miry and slippery. As he lay injured at the bottom, Confucius looked in and said, ‘My friend, I am sorry for you; if you ever get out of that place, take care that you never fall in again.’

Then a Buddhist priest came along. “I grieve to see your plight. If you can manage to climb up two thirds of the way, or even half, I might help you up the rest.’ Unable to rise, such advice was mockery. Then Christ came by. Descending into the pit, He lifted the man to safety. ‘That,’ said the convert, ‘is the difference between Christ and others.’”

Do you know this difference? It is most important. The way to life is by looking up to Jesus, the Crucified, with the eyes of faith. For it is by faith alone that you can see in Jesus ***“The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”***¹² Thank God, friends, if you today can confess this faith, “I believe in God the Son, my only Saviour.”

3. “I Believe In God The Holy Spirit.”

The Work of the Holy Spirit. If you are a believer, this shows the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart. For Jesus tells Nicodemus, ***“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*** ***“That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.***

As “flesh born of flesh,” a sinner, I know from the Scriptures that I do not have the power to come to God. But if I now know Jesus as my Saviour, it is because the Holy Spirit has worked that faith in my heart. By the power of the Holy Spirit in baptism I have been born again; and I am a member of the kingdom of God.

I do not need to know the exact time and place of my conversion, nor need I be able to point to some momentous religious crisis in my life to be sure that I have been “born again.” If I am a believer, that is proof that I have been born of the Holy Spirit. And faith, then, is not a good work on my part which earns heaven for me, but the Holy Spirit’s gracious gift by which the blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation flow from God to me.

The work of the Holy Spirit is a mysterious work. It is called the work of conversion and regeneration. Therefore the Lord counsels Nicodemus, “⁷ ***Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’*** Mysterious, yes; but how many things there are in the realm of nature all around us which we take for granted, but which defy our understanding!

Can you explain life? Seed germination? Electricity? Or the wind? “***The wind,***” says Jesus, ***blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes.*** Then - ***So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.***” Thus while the work of the Holy Spirit may be seen in the godly life of a converted person, still the manner in which the Holy Spirit brings about the change is a deep mystery.

“***How can these things be?***” exclaims Nicodemus in amazement. Jesus answers, “***Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?***” ¹¹ ***Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.***

¹² ***“If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”***

The “new birth” wrought by the Holy Spirit may be called an “earthly thing” in view of the fact that it is done on earth, in the hearts of men. Some evidence of this mysterious work Nicodemus could see in the new life of a converted person. Still he did not believe.

What, then, could he make of *“heavenly things,”* such as these, *“No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.* Here the Lord touches on those deep mysteries of His essential unity with the Father and of the union of the divine and human natures in His Person. And here we can but exclaim with St. Paul, *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!”*¹³ Thus we also marvel at the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, with Nicodemus we may at times be tempted to ask, *“How can these things be?”* But, friends, we really do not want a God whom we can understand, a God brought down to our own finite level. At all times, and especially in the day of trouble, we want to turn to One who is above us, far above all earthly and human limitations, a God who is the Lord of all. Only that kind of God is worth turning to.

We have such a God. And of this God the Holy Spirit has made known to us in the Scriptures everything we need to know for our eternal salvation. To demand more of Him would be sheer impudence. To reject Him because we do not understand Him would be absolute pride and folly.

No, we will never in this life understand the mysterious workings of the Spirit of God. But *“there is something better than understanding God, and that is trusting God.”*¹⁴ And the basis of such trust is the sure word of our Lord, *“unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* There we confess, even though we do not understand, “I believe in God the Holy Spirit.”

The Scriptures, then, present to us the Triune God. God the Father, our Creator, our Preserver and the Author of our salvation. God the Son, our only Saviour. And God the life-giving Spirit.

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity therefore is not a mere theological definition on page 55 of our Small Catechism;¹⁵ something which we had to learn in order to be confirmed. But it is a glorious revelation of the true and living God, who fills our present life on earth and who assures us of unending glory with Him. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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- ¹ Psalm 127:3
 - ² Malachi 2:10
 - ³ Genesis 1:2
 - ⁴ John 1:3
 - ⁵ John 5:26
 - ⁶ Hebrews 1:2
 - ⁷ Genesis 1:27
 - ⁸ Colossians 3:10
 - ⁹ Ephesians 4:24
 - ¹⁰ Numbers 21:6
 - ¹¹ Thomas Arnold
 - ¹² John 1:29
 - ¹³ Romans 11:33
 - ¹⁴ G. L. Knight.
 - ¹⁵ *Luther's Small Catechism*, Q 19, Who is the only true God?, CPH 1991