

## Gospel - John 3: 1-17

### First Sunday After Pentecost

Sermon 5.30.21

Fr. Duane Fister



Today is Trinity Sunday, and Trinity is stamped all over today's Gospel reading. "God" occurs 6 times; "Son" occurs 4 and "Spirit" occurs 3 times.

In the Church of England and in many Lutheran churches Trinity Sunday is marked by a recitation of the Athanasian Creed, which contains the Trinitarian formula. In our Prayer Book, the Athanasian Creed is tucked away in tiny print on page 864.

Since today celebrates our one God the Triune, I thought it good to begin with a review of this formula.

First, Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son or Child, is entirely God and entirely human and entirely sinless.

Second, our God is three-in-one: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

(If you prefer, God is Parent with a capital P, Child with a capital C and Spirit with a capital S.)

God the Parent is God. Jesus, God's begotten Child is God. The Spirit is God. They are co-equal and co-eternal, one God.

But the Parent is not the Child, and the Child is not the Parent. Neither is the Parent the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Parent. The Child is not the Spirit, nor is the Spirit the Child. They are three individual Persons; one God.

You may be asking yourself by now, "What difference does it make?" If you want to explore that, I have a book of theology on my shelf entitled, *The Difference It Makes*.

Suffice to say that that every Trinitarian idea leads us to this: **"God so loved the world."** Or as we have sung since our childhood, "Jesus loves me! This I know, for the Bible tells me so." God the One Triune loves you, and God through Christ gives you eternal life from before all time.

But what about this story of Nicodemus and Jesus? Nicodemus is a Jewish leader who comes to Jesus in a clandestine way in order to ask his troubling questions. Jesus answers, but in a way that Nicodemus doesn't quite understand. By the time we finish the reading Jesus continues on with his discourse, while the presence of Nicodemus fades into the silent background. In other words Nicodemus grows quiet, listening, mesmerized.

I really like that Nicodemus brings his questions. One of them is, "How can these things be?" We would ask why. Why are these things happening?

I was in a discussion with Patti Case this week where she told me that the Episcopal Church is a church of inquiry. God is big enough and Jesus is big enough and Spirit is big enough and our church is big enough to

handle whatever kind of questions we may need to ask. But God also is willing for us to just sit in quietness with our questions and not necessarily get immediate or even easy-to-understand answers.

Apparently it was Nicodemus' questions and not necessarily the answers that finally led him to become a Jesus-follower.

Without trying to sound glib or trite, Christ himself is the answer. His person and his presence are as important as and possibly more important than his pronouncements. That is why—among the many varied other reasons we have for coming—we come to church in order to experience the person of Jesus himself and also his love.

We meet Jesus at the font of baptism, where we are “born from above” and formed from above “of water and the Spirit.” God puts his holy mark on us, lays claim to us, and says to us, “You are eternally mine.”

We meet Jesus at the pulpit, where we hear God's Word proclaimed.

In the words of today's reading, “We speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen.” We come to hear our preachers testify to what they see and what they know.

Even when we do not fully understand or sometimes zone out, proclamation of the Word still heartens us. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus did not understand everything the risen Jesus told them; nevertheless they still said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

We meet Jesus at the table where he shares with us his own flesh and blood. Again, to quote from today's Gospel, “So must the Son of Man be lifted up [on the cross, so] that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

By water and Spirit, by the Word and by the body and blood of our Lord we come to church to receive and experience for ourselves once more “the old, old story of Jesus and his love.”

One time Jesus began teaching his disciples about his upcoming betrayal and death. It says that “they did not understand; its meaning was concealed. And they were afraid to ask him.” Therefore Jesus said to them, “Let these words sink down into your ears” (Luke 9:44-45).

This morning I want to say to you the same words, only tie them to John 3:16: Let these words really sink down into your ears—

God loves you, God loves the whole world; so much that God would have his only Son to die for us, so that whoever believes in him may not perish, but have eternal life.

After all of Nicodemus' wondering and questioning, he finally gets to just sit quietly with Jesus holding onto that single, heart-penetrating idea: God loves the world; and God loves Nicodemus; that's all that matters and nothing else.

What happened to Nicodemus? He will reappear in Chapter 7, defending Jesus to the other Jewish leaders. He will appear in Chapter 19 to help lay Jesus' body in the tomb. In both instances today's midnight encounter is

remembered. It seems that Nicodemus's questions and his struggle to understand are what begin a reshaping of his life.

Nicodemus' questions are simply a metaphor or emblem for all of the problems we may be going through, questions for which we have no good answers, life circumstances that won't let up and won't let go. We come with our wondering wounds and our brokenness, and we wait in his love. Or as the old hymn instructs us,

*Come, ye disconsolate, where'er ye languish;  
come to the mercy seat, fervently kneel.  
Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish;  
earth has no sorrows that heaven cannot heal.*

Will you please take a moment this morning simply to receive for yourself Christ's presence and love? I invite you to close your eyes, listen to God's words, and receive God's love:

*For God so loved the world—  
for God so loved you his child  
from before you were born,  
from the time you were baptized,  
for all your life long—  
that he gave his only Son,  
so that everyone who believes in him  
may not perish but may have eternal life.*

I will ring the bell a second time when I want you to "come back."

*Ring the bell.*

*Silence.*

*Ring the bell a second time.*

The thought is not lost on me that this is Memorial Day Sunday, in which we remember and honor Veterans and loved ones who have died, family and friends, whom we grieve, whom we miss.

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Coincidentally, perhaps, this date, May 30, is the feast day of a veteran of the Hundred Years War, **St. Joan of Arc**, who was led by the Spirit through the voices of saints and angels.

At age 17 she carried a sword but wounded no person. She led with a banner bearing the names of Jesus and Maria, and a nation's army followed her. Against the odds she laid open the way for her dauphin to be crowned legitimate king in France. For these acts she was captured, tried and martyred.

We remember her courage, her sacrifice, her story and the stories, as well, of our own St David family members who have passed in 2020 and until now—

Shirley Beelik  
Joan Cheston  
Betty Eager  
Marian Eveleth  
Bob & Kathleen Hart  
John (Jack) Krause  
Marilyn Miller  
Terry O'Hara  
Nancy Stanislay  
Bud West

Let us pray . . .

O God, whose mercies cannot be numbered: Accept our prayers on behalf of your servants whom we have named. We hold them in our love. We trust that in your presence they will grow in love to see you face to face. We are sad that they are gone from us, but glad they are home with you. As we call them to memory, please lead us by their godly examples. As they have loved you, help us to love one another. Please grant them a wide entrance into the land of light and joy, in the fellowship of your saints; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*