

In the name of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Quite often, I begin the sermon by commenting on how well the readings for the day fit together and how they have a unified theme, or don't. Today is Trinity Sunday, the day that we celebrate, or at least consider the doctrine of the Trinity – our closely held belief that God is one being in three persons.

This belief in the Trinity has been a foundational piece of Christianity for many centuries. But it has also been quite troublesome, because it is so hard to really get a grip on. It is difficult for the mind to grasp the concept that God is unified – one being in every way, and yet at the same time that God is three different aspects: the Father (Creator); the Son (Redeemer) and the Spirit (Sustainer). And today's readings cannot really address the totality of the difficulty we have with this doctrine because the Trinitarian God is never directly mentioned in Scripture. Go ahead. Look it up. The term "Holy Trinity" is not there.

We have descriptions of the acts of Creation done by God, beginning with the creation stories in Genesis. Over and over we get stories of the way God created heaven, earth, humanity and all that continues to be created. We also have texts that speak about God the Son – a lot of them. In fact, the entirety of the New Testament is devoted to stories of God, the Son – Jesus Christ – what He did during His earthly ministry and what

His presence means to us today. And woven through all of those stories, both Old Testament and New, are stories that speak of the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the world. But there is no text that deals directly with all three entities that make up the Trinity.

Maybe it's best that – for the most part – we leave deep discussions of the history and application of the doctrine of the Trinity to Christian education forums and use the pulpit for consideration of what this Holy Trinity means in our everyday lives. So what **can** we learn about God – and us – from these Trinity readings? Many things. But I would really like to consider that this morning's readings reflect the fact that God is One who *sends* in order to get God's mission accomplished.

This morning's reading from Isaiah is one of the favorites for use at ordination services. Isaiah has a vision in which he is experiencing being in the presence of God on a holy throne. Even though he cannot see God directly, the prophet is humbled to the point of terror by God's proximity because he realizes how unworthy he is to stand in the presence of God. Isaiah knows that he has not always spoken well or properly. He says that he has "unclean lips," and is not worthy to speak about God, much less *to* God. But God *sends* an angel to purify the prophet's lips. Then he "heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And (Isaiah) said, 'Here am I; *send* me!'" And send him, is exactly what God did.

The Gospel reading contains Jesus' famous discussion with Nicodemus, the Pharisee. Nicodemus, like Isaiah, had been *sent* by God to perform a mission. He was a leader of the Temple, one of the people in charge of keeping God's law among the Jewish people. And God *sent* him to Jesus for an explanation of what makes Jesus different from the prophets and the pretend messiahs who had come before. Jesus recognized Nicodemus as having a pure heart, unlike the other Pharisees who tried to trap Jesus into breaking some part of Torah. So Jesus explained rebirth in the Spirit to Nicodemus. And ultimately Nicodemus was convinced, to the point where he defended Jesus before the Sanhedrin – the council of the Temple – before Jesus was crucified. God *sent* Nicodemus to perform a mission. Nicodemus answered God's call and became an important instrument of God's mission in the world. But the last part of the Gospel reading tells us about God's most important act of sending.

John 3:16 is one of the few Bible verses that almost everyone can quote from memory. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Jesus was the ultimate example of God *sending* someone to accomplish God's purpose in the world. God loved the world enough that God decided this mission of sending was too important to be done by anyone other than an aspect of God Himself – God the Son.

The world was so broken; it had gotten so far away from the perfect creation that we read about in Genesis, that God had to try something brand new to restart perfected

creation. Throughout the Old Testament there is a repeating cycle of stories in which God makes covenants – contracts – with humanity. In these covenants God promised to give people the whole world (or at least everything that was good for them) if they would only be faithful and worship the one true God. But every time, the people could not live up to their part of the covenant. They would always stray away and begin to worship things other than God. This would anger God and God would punish the people for their idolatry. Then the people would repent and return to God and God would offer them a new covenant. The cycle began in the Garden of Eden. It continued with Noah and Abraham. Over and over God tried to covenant with humanity, but without success. God loved this creation of His very much, but God was running out of ways to try to make the covenant work. Then God decided to do something brand new.

God “gave” His only Son – God *sent* His only Son – so that all who believe in Him should not perish, but would have everlasting life. God *sent* an aspect of God’s self – the Only Son – not just to try to explain a covenant; not just to try to enter into a new covenant – but to **BE** the new covenant between God and humanity. Jesus came into the world to be the contract – the agreement between God and the creation that God loved so much. For the first time, people were not entering into a covenant with a God they could not see, some distant and frightening God. Instead, they had this human aspect of God right in front of them. They could see the love of God reflected in the face of Jesus. They could see the healing power of God reflected in the deeds of Jesus. They could see

the world being fed and nourished through the actions of Jesus. They even saw death defeated through the wonder of Jesus.

God *sent* Jesus to perform the most important task God had ever accomplished – the redemption of the world. And began the work of perfecting the world on a cross on Calvary. But now God has empowered US with the Holy Spirit so that we can continue the work of redemption that Jesus started. God *sent* the Holy Spirit to us so that we might have the power to perform the work that God *sends* us to do.

God *sends* us into the world every day. As believers in the God of Creation we are called to be *sent* out to be the hands, the eyes and the voice of God in the world around us. God loves us enough to send Jesus. It is up to us to use the gifts we have been given in the way the way they were intended – as reflections of the power of God’s love of creation.

God the Creator brought you into being. God the Son redeemed your life and the world around you. God the Holy Spirit is ready to empower your life. Listen to God’s call. Be brave enough to say yes. Then begin to live a life in which reflection of the loving God is the most important thing in your life. “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” and you. Starting today, let’s live like it.

Amen