

Sermon 2010 Holy Trinity  
Text: John 8:58  
Theme: "One God. One Truth."  
5-30-10

Nothing causes people to become angrier than being confronted with truth that they do not like. As a young pastor, I was amazed at how defensive and angry people became when confronted with what seemed obvious from Scripture. The younger you are, the more open you are to the truth and less tolerant you are of hypocrisy because you are still forming all your beliefs. What I had not understood yet was the amount of energy that we invest convincing ourselves that we are right and the level of hypocrisy we will maintain in order to make it seem that we are right. Then, when we are confronted with the truth which cannot be manipulated, we get angry.

In the Gospel for today, Jesus confronts the people with the truth that before the world came into being, he was God – fully God – not a god or a godly man – God. He says before Abraham was, I AM and I AM is another way of saying Yahweh, which is God's name as told to Moses.

So the people understood the Father was completely alien to them and horrendously demanding of them. He was a jealous God. And they understood that Jesus was one of them, born of Mary, living

among them as a Rabbi. He said some interesting stuff and was able to do some pretty impressive miracles – BUT – BUT if Jesus and the Father are one, that is a problem. Because now one of them was God and God was in their midst and could see with his own eyes all of their fake religiosity and their hypocrisy that they used to try and defend the truth as they wanted to believe it. So they picked up stones to kill him rather than adjust their system of belief. That should give you a clue as to how dedicated we are to the truths we make up.

The Holy Trinity tends to throw a monkey wrench into our gear box because we cannot understand the Trinity. Every model we use to try to describe it is wrong. Water, ice and steam – nope - God does not just appear in three different ways, he is actually three different persons in one Godhead. The apple seed, the flesh and the skin - nope – God is not three separate beings working together to form one God but one unified Godhead with three distinct persons. All the analogies break down into heresy because we cannot mentally grasp the Holy Trinity. We can only say what God says and pray for faith to believe what the Scriptures teach – One God, Three persons co-equal, co-eternal.

Why is that so difficult? Well, first off it does not match human reason or any human methods of trying to explain how it works. It drives us a little nuts to have something in our midst that we cannot explain. It seems generally okay not to be able to reproduce the phenomena, but we like to be able to at least explain it. But the Trinity requires faith.

Once again, God takes my belief system away from me and places it squarely with himself. Human beings do not like that. We like to believe that we have at least some part in our own salvation. I mean, okay, I can live with the fact that I couldn't pay for my own sins but come on, I need to do something! At least I need to be able to believe or not believe once I understand the basic working of the system. But God never lets us have any credit. He does ALL the work of salvation and we are ONLY recipients of his gracious gift of salvation – with nothing from us.

Why is this truth important? First of all just because it is the truth. Jesus seems to think knowing the truth is really important because the truth is the key that unlocks the shackles from our legs. Before he says something that is important, he regularly uses the

formula of saying Amen. Amen. Which means truly, truly or verily, verily.

Secondly, it is important for us to receive the complete Godhead and not just parts of it. Why would we only want part of the gift? That's like having macaroni and cheese with no cheese – is the macaroni still good? Sure, I guess but Mac and Cheese is just not the same with no cheese. Is the Father still good without the Son? Sure but what good is the Father to us if there is no Son to save us? Is the Holy Spirit still the Holy Spirit without the Son? Sure, but if he is not calling us to the Son and creating faith to believe in the Son, what is the point of the Holy Spirit. So the Holy Trinity all works together to make an amazing gift for us and the complete gift is greater than any part of the gift.

The Holy Trinity is what defines Christianity from every human system of religion and it is the great stumbling block for all human systems. All the human systems of religion come to a point where they do not want the complete gift from God. It is too big. It is too unbelievable. It takes over our lives. So one can spot the heresy at the gift refusal point. At some point, people without faith will say no thanks Lord – I prefer a lesser god. I want a god that I can define. I

want a god that I can understand. But most of all, I want a god that I can manipulate.

So what are we to do about all these people who refuse our Triune God's good and gracious gifts? Our calling is first to know the Scriptures and be able to witness to their truth. We are called to proclaim what is true. Now understand, we do not need to defend God. God is a big God. He is all grown up and is big enough to defend himself. Neither are we called to argue because no one has ever been argued into believing something he did not want to believe. We are called simply to proclaim the truth as delivered to us from Holy Scriptures.

Then we trust. We trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to use our witness to create and strengthen faith in people. Just the other night I led a High School Bible Study. If you ever want your faith in the Holy Trinity tested, come teach a High School Bible study on Wednesday nights. Few people really want to be there. Often their parents make them come or they come for the fun and fellowship and have to get through the Bible study as the price for fun. So there are times I look at Judy and ask, "why do we do this again?" and she dutifully reminds me, because God uses us. Over the years we have seen God work and

we know that somehow through all the balls flying at our heads and the cell phones going off, God reaches through His Word and creates and strengthens faith. That is the truth. Jesus says the Father creates and preserves life. The Son redeems us from hell and the Holy Spirit calls us, gathers us together, enlightens us to the truth and slowly makes us holy people of God. That's the truth.

There was an old lady I once knew who may have been the wisest woman in the world. When I knew her she was old but no one knew how old. She had no teeth, only one dress that we knew of, never saw her wear shoes except to walk to church 3 or 4 times a week and she lived in a tar paper shack where the papers were delivered for the paper boys to pick up for their routes. She sat on that porch every afternoon as we folded papers and spoke of life; how wonderful it was to be alive, for she had outlived a husband and all her children; how wonderful God was to give us such a beautiful world, though she had never seen anything beyond Morgan county where she was born and would die; how amazing it was that there was such love in the world; though the only company she had for Christmas was a group of paper boys for whom she had made hot chocolate to drink as we folded the Christmas Eve edition. Looking back, I imagine that she

had had to save for months to buy that extra milk and coco that we took for granted. She was the wisest woman in the world for she had stopped demanding that God explain himself. She had stopped arguing about God. She just sat on her porch and proclaimed the truth of her God. She went to church and Bible study 3 or 4 times a week and filled up on his Word. She knew truth. She lived truth and she was not only the wisest person I ever knew but she was the freest person I ever knew as well. AMEN.