

TRINITY SUNDAY SERMON

THE HOLY TRINITY

June 12, 2022

Sermon Text: John 8:48-49

'It Matters'

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

The Word of God that is the basis for our meditation is the Gospel Reading from John, chapter 8, and where especially we read again these words: “So the Jews said to Jesus, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.” So far the words of our text.

‘It doesn’t matter what you believe, as long as you are sincere in what you believe.’ That’s a popular opinion that you hear these days, isn’t it? But when you stop to think about, it makes no sense. ‘I sincerely believe that it doesn’t matter if I were to drive down the highway at 150 kilometers-an-hour after consuming a six-pack of beer.’ I wonder, however, if the RCMP would think that it doesn’t matter?! Or take this popular one: ‘I believe in God . . . as I understand God to be.’ Or this one: ‘I believe that all religions are just different paths to God.’ But is this really so?

After all, contrast those popular statements and common ideas with what the Athanasian Creed, that we usually confess on this Trinity Sunday, says. “Whoever desires to be saved must believe” . . . this. And then a bunch of things are said: “One God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity. Equal in glory and majesty. Uncreated, infinite, eternal, almighty. The Son not created but begotten. The Holy Spirit neither created nor begotten, but proceeding.” And further: “Jesus Christ at the same time both God and man, who suffered for our salvation, rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and will come to judge the living and

the dead.” That’s what we confess. That’s what we believe. And do you know what? It matters!

But why does it matter? That’s a question many are asking these days. And some would say, ‘It doesn’t matter!’ It doesn’t matter to the millions of people in Ukraine who have lost everything as a result of the devastation caused by the Russian invasion of their country. It doesn’t matter to those who are mourning the loss of a loved one, or to those who lost their job and don’t know how they’re going to make ends meet. It doesn’t matter to those whose marriage has fallen apart, or to those who received the dreaded news of cancer from their doctor after a check-up. It doesn’t matter when inflation and covid continue to dominate not only the news, but our daily lives. Cold, hard facts like the Athanasian Creed don’t matter when the rubber of faith meets the hard road of life. And the church, therefore, needs to be more loving and accepting, more practical and less doctrinal – so some would say . . . even many within the church.

But the fact of the matter, however, is that it is precisely for all those reasons that it does matter! Love and doctrine are not opposites . . . or at least they should not be. For since the Scriptures tell us that “God is love,” then to know God is to know love. Conversely, to not know God is to not know love.

And when the Athanasian Creed says “whoever desires to be saved must believe”. . . this; it says that not because you have to pass a test and have all the right knowledge in order to get into heaven – although that’s probably how it sounds sometimes. No, it matters because to know God aright is to know His love for you . . . to know that in love God died for you. The Christian faith, you see, isn’t about good people doing good things in good ways in order to have a good life. Instead, it’s about God, who alone is good, dying on a cross of all things for no-good sinners. It’s about a loving God doing good things for un-lovable people.

More specifically, it’s about God the Father giving His own Son into death as the payment price for the sins of the entire world, and who then gives the Holy Spirit to join us to Himself both now and forever. That’s who God is and that’s what God does. The two go together. And you either have both, or you have neither. So St. John puts it in his First Epistle: “This is love, not that we have loved God

but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Whoever, therefore, confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”

And that’s why it matters. That’s why “whoever desires to be saved must believe” . . . this. It’s a matter of life and death. And if God only loves us when we are good? . . . well, that matters. If it wasn’t God Himself dying on a cross to pay for your sins . . . that matters. If there are many ways to get to heaven and the Son of God did not really have to become one of us in order to die in our place on a cross . . . that matters. But, on the other hand, if God in love desires to save us for eternity . . . if He sent His eternal, only-begotten Son into our flesh to accomplish this by dying Himself . . . if He sends His Spirit by means of His Word to give to us personally the blessings of what happened there on the cross and to be with us and comfort us through all the trials and troubles and tragedies of life . . . well, that matters, too!

Yes, it matters that we know aright who God is . . . and not just the facts about God – Three in One and One in Three and all that; but what God has done for us in a manger and on a cross at a real time and a real place in the course of history. For, there, God shows His great love for us sinners. There, God shows that He will never leave us or forsake us, no matter how bad things get. And that matters!

In fact, that was the plan of God from before the foundation of the world. It’s who God is and what God does. We heard in the Old Testament Reading from the book of Proverbs that Wisdom – the Son – was there with the Father at creation. They delighted in and loved one another, and they delighted in and loved their creation. And then, St. Peter in his Pentecost sermon spells out how God’s plan to redeem His creation from sin and death had been revealed long ago, and then accomplished by Jesus. Yes, Jesus who is before Abraham and also the promised offspring of Abraham . . . Jesus who shows us the Father and His love for us . . . Jesus who sends the Holy Spirit to give to us, to join us to, to unite us in that love so that we might truly know God and His love.

But that’s precisely what the Jews of Jesus’ day, what so many people today, cannot wrap their heads around and, in their hardness of hearts, do not accept – this amazing love of God for sinners. But if God is not this, and if God does not

do this for us; then we are the ones who must do it. Bear our own sin. Find our own way to eternal life. Be our own saviour. The Jews here in our text foolishly thought they could do that . . . and so also many people today. To which, however, Jesus would remind us: “I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

And do you know what? That matters. It matters, when death is staring you in the face, that you have been baptized into the name of The Holy Trinity who has defeated death and the grave for you. It matters, when the trials and tumults and tribulations of this world come upon you, that you receive the Body and Blood of the only-begotten Son of God and Son of Mary who has endured all this for you, who knows how it is to carry burdens, and who has promised to be with you and never leave you or forsake you. It matters, when the thought of all your sins and failures and shortcomings cause you to be afraid of standing before the judgment seat of the Lord and Creator of all on the Last Day, that here and now He says to you through the Holy Spirit: “I forgive you all your sins. If anyone abides in My Word, he will never see death.”

“The catholic faith” is what the Athanasian Creed calls all this. Yes, ‘catholic’; that is, universal, that which at all times and in all places is to be believed, taught, and confessed because God’s love in His Son is meant for everyone, for all people. . . including, therefore, you and me; and not just for a select few.

Yes, God for you . . . God with you . . . God in you. The Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity. That matters! And that is something, as the Athanasian Creed reminds us, to keep, to guard, to treasure, to hold on to, to share with others, to stand firm in . . . to use the theme of our Lutheran Church–Canada Convention that is meeting in Edmonton this very day. After all, “This is the catholic faith; whoever does not believe it faithfully and firmly cannot be saved.” Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.