

Andrew K. Frey Pentecost 1 (Trinity and Confirmation Sunday)

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. ² He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

³ In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

⁴ “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!”

⁵ Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”

⁹ “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (NIV 84)

Theme: Remain in the Faith of the Triune God

For the past few years, both here at Holy Cross and at Trinity, you have been taught God’s saving truth. Using Luther’s small Catechism your pastors and teachers have taught you the basics of God’s Word.

John 3:1-17 Holy Cross, Standish, MI.

May 31, 2015

Some of it came easy for you, and some of it wasn’t so easy. Some of it made sense, but much of it didn’t.

Take the doctrine of the Trinity for example. We just recited together some of the Athanasian Creed which explains the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity as well as humanly possible. There is only one God; but there are three persons in that one God—The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; but there are not three gods but one God. They are separate and distinct, yet at the same time they are one. Three-in-one. The Son is eternally begotten of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son; yet they are co-equal.

What sense does that make? Who can fully understand this teaching? That’s the thing—no one can. There are many such teachings throughout Scripture—ones that we can’t grasp by our human mind; ones that make absolutely no sense to our human reason. So why believe it? Because they Bible Says it; and so our reason must be cast aside and play not part in this faith.

But that is hard to do sometimes. You are sinful flesh, born from sinful flesh. Your parents were sinful and that means that when you were born you were born as a sinful human being. **Flesh gives birth to flesh** Jesus says. There is no chance that you can end up being better than your parents—you will forever remain a sinful human being. And it isn’t just that you were born in a state of sinfulness, your sinful nature has led you to commit many sins against the Lord—too numerous to count. And so you deserve to be condemned. And there is nothing you can do to save yourself or remove your sinful flesh. Having this sinful flesh means that you’re not in-tune with the will of God. You don’t know God by nature, you know who he is or what he has done. And there is much of his Word that your mind can’t handle—impossible for you to understand. So what does your sinful nature what to do? Reject it—anything that doesn’t make sense to your reason, anything that is impossible, your natural instinct is to pass it off as a fable, as a false story. Or in the case of a doctrine, like the Trinity, to try to explain it or understand it in a way that makes sense. But when you try to do that, you undoubtedly get something wrong; for some doctrines are beyond understanding.

That is why you were brought to the baptismal font. Your mom knew the state into which you were born, so she had you baptized. It was in your baptism that the Holy Spirit brought you to faith in Jesus Christ as your one and only Savior. It is in your baptism that your Old Adam was drowned, your sins washed away, and you were clothed in the righteous robes of Christ.

Flesh (may) give birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

In your baptism the Holy Spirit gave you a new life, you were born again into Christ. No longer are you God's enemies, no longer will you be condemned because of your sins. For your faith, given to you in baptism, receives the blessings that God the son won for you through his perfect life, death, and resurrection. Jesus connects baptism to salvation in verse five, **I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.**

At the end of Mark he connects baptism with faith and salvation, **whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, whoever does not believe will be condemned.** That is as clear and simple as it gets. Those who are baptized will be saved through the faith given at baptism. But those who don't believe will not be saved—without faith there is no way to receive what Christ has done for us.

And what did he do for you? He saved you. That is why God sent his son into the world and why Jesus suffered and died for us. John 3:16—one of the most famous Bible passages, and most likely one of the verses you have read, and one of the first to have memorized tells us so: **For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** Christ came down to this earth to take our place that we might live with him through faith in him.

It's as simple as that—if only that were simple! Even though your sins were washed away and your Old Adam drowned in baptism, your sinful nature still remains. And your sinful nature wants nothing to do with Christ or his Word. For the rest of your life a war will wage inside of you between your sinful nature and the new man created at your baptism. You must daily drown the Old Man who tries to overtake you.

And it's not just your Old Adam that you'll have to contend with. Unless you attend WELS schools for the rest of your life, your faith will be challenged in one way or another. You'll be bombarded with

the teaching of evolution which set itself up against what God says about creation and many other parts of his Word. You may get mocked and ridiculed for believing that someone rose from the dead. Society will attack your old-fashioned beliefs; they may even call you unloving or bigoted. And it may be even at home, that your faith is mocked as foolish. It is a big temptation then to downplay God's Word, to cave in here and there until it becomes less and less of a priority.

And left to fend for yourself, the Old Adam takes over. A few verses after our text Jesus explains what we are all like by nature: **men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.** We aren't inclined to what is good and right, but to what is horrible, wicked, and selfish. And if we don't beat back that sinful nature—drown that Old Adam we will succumb to that sinful nature as we chase after darkness.

And how do you do this—you can't; but the Holy Spirit can and does through the gospel. Through the Word he reminds you of what Christ has done, he increases your knowledge of him and his Word and he strengthens your faith. Through the sacrament of Holy Communion, which you now have the right to receive, he gives you a tangible forgiveness and increases your faith as you receive his true body and blood in, with, and under the bread and the wine. So if you want to remain in the one true faith, if you want your baptism to be any good at all, it is necessary for you to remain in the gospel throughout the rest of your life. Attend Church regularly, study his Word at home, make Bible Class a priority the rest of your days; and attend the Lord's Supper whenever possible. And as you do so the Holy Spirit will work through that gospel and keep you in the one true faith.

You know that. You have been hearing me say that for years—as have your teachers and the pastors from Trinity. You know full well that in order to remain in the one true faith into which you were baptized and in order to keep your confirmation vows you must remain in the Word. But every other confirmands have known that too—they just didn't listen. Or at least it seems that way. But the truth is no one at their confirmation intends to fall away; everyone makes a sincere vow. So it's not as if they didn't listen but that their sinful nature got the best of them. They were in the Word less and less; their faith was weakened

and they no longer made regular use of the only weapon powerful enough to beat back our Old Adam.

And so what happened? Many have fallen away from the one true faith—and many will continue to do so. Perhaps it is because so many see confirmation as somewhat tantamount to a graduation. You studied and studied and you finally made it—now you are done; you no longer have to study God's Word! Right?!? Nope, not even close. You have learned a lot, but you have only been taught the basics of God's Word. You are still young in your faith. Although you have been in Lutheran Elementary School for nine years, have spent the last several years in confirmation class, and know a good amount —sadly you know much more than some of our members, you still haven't learned everything. There is still room to grow in your knowledge of God's Word and in your faith. And this learning and growing will never stop.

Those who have fallen away serve as warnings. There are many case studies; the numbers aren't great. The truth is more than half of confirmands will eventually fall from the faith. What side do you want to be on? There is only one way to stay on the side of faith: remain in the gospel! Do that and you will be saved.

That's what the Triune God wants to happen; that is why the Father sent the Son into the world. As he says in verse 17, **God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.** The triune God doesn't want anyone to perish, but that all believe in him and be saved. He doesn't want to punish you and send you to hell for eternity. That is why, out of love, he sent his son into the world. That is why he sent the Holy Spirit who worked faith into your heart through the gospel.

The Father sent the son into the world and the son gave up his life for you—that he could take your place and win for you the victory over death that you could not win. The Holy Spirit brought you to faith to bring you to faith through which you receive the blessings given to you.

And as a result a new life is now yours and eternal life in heaven awaits. That is the goal of your faith—the salvation of your soul. The Son has won it for you; so remain in his Word and by the Holy Spirit you will remain in him all the days of his life, share in his glory, and join him in eternal life. Amen.