

The Holy Trinity

Sunday June 7

Psalm 8:1-9 (NIV) ¹O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. ²From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. ³When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? ⁵You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. ⁶You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: ⁷all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, ⁸the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. ⁹O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Genesis 1:1-2:4a (NIV) ¹In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ³And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. ⁶And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." ⁷So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸God called the expanse "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day. ⁹And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good. ¹¹Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. ¹²The land

produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day. ¹⁴And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, ¹⁵and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. ¹⁶God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day. ²⁰And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." ²¹So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." ²³And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day. ²⁴And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. ²⁵God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea

and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." ²⁹Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. ³⁰And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so. ³¹God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. ¹Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. ²By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. ³And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. ⁴This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. . . .

Acts 2:14a, 22-36 (NIV) ¹⁴Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd:

²²"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. ²⁵David said about him: "I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. ²⁶Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, ²⁷because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. ²⁸You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence." ²⁹"Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹Seeing what

was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. ³²God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. ³³ Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. ³⁴For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand ³⁵until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." ³⁶"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

Matthew 28:16-20 (NIV) ¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The Relational God

Matthew 28:16-20

Made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27)

By baptism God gives himself to us and establishes a new relationship with us as:

☐ God the Father

The Heavenly Father becomes *our* Father and adopts us as his children (Galatians 3:26-27; 4:4-6; John 1:12-13; 1 John 3:1)

☐ Jesus, the Son of God

The Son of God becomes our Redeemer, for we are baptized in union with his death (Romans 6:3-6) and cleansed by his blood to be his own (Ephesians 5:26; 1 John 1:7) and have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27), so that his righteousness is our glorious dress (Isaiah 61:10), and we become members of his body (Ephesians 5:30; 1 Corinthians 12:13)

☐ God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit becomes our Sanctifier (Romans 15:16)—who makes us holy; our Comforter or Counselor (John 14:16) and the guarantee (down payment) of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 1:22), we become his temple in which together with the father and the Son he dwells (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Benediction: 2 Corinthians 13:14 (ESV)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Before I begin the message on this Sunday of the Holy Trinity, I would like us to confess the Nicene Creed together, which is a confession of the Trinity.

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became fully human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

The main words of Nicene Creed were hammered out by the Bishops of the Church in 325 AD—not quite 300 years after the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This creed, and the teaching of the Trinity in general, was not an intellectual exercise in theological trivia.

These Bishops had been through the great persecution, which began with the Emperor Diocletian and ended a little more than a decade before the council convened.

When the Emperor Constantine, who had gathered the Bishops together at his own expense, entered the great hall in regal splendor—decked out with precious jewels and gold embroidery—he gazed upon an even greater splendor—an unspeakable heavenly beauty of those who bore on their bodies (as the Apostle Paul said) the marks of Christ.

The bishops had endured disfigurement in the Great Persecution. The right eye of many had been gouged out. Others had their legs maimed so they could not escape the toil of the mines. Some of them carried the scars of whippings and beatings. One was crippled in both hands as a result of red-hot irons.

These were the scars of horrible torture meant to make them deny their faith—but they would not. For these Bishops, the truth of the Trinity was worth suffering for and dying for.

Nowhere in the Bible does God explain the Trinity to us, and the word Trinity, is not found there.

The Bible *does* clearly tell us there is one God; and the Bible clearly reveals, this one God, in three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Each one is not the other, and even though distinct, they are one. And that is the definition of Trinity—Three in One.

While we find glimpses of the Trinity in the Old Testament, it is revealed to us clearly in the New Testament as the means of our salvation.

You see, if there were no Trinity, we could not be saved. For there must be a Father in heaven, who so loved the world, that He sent His only begotten Son to become a human being; there must be a Son, who, as God incarnate, fulfilled the law for us and suffered and died in our place—redeeming us from our sin; and there must be a Holy Spirit, who calls us through the gospel,

convicting us of sin, and bringing us to a saving faith in Jesus Christ, making us the temple in which He lives.

The teaching of the Trinity is not esoteric, but intensely personal. It instructs us about this deeply personal being who is God.

God reveals his work for us, and in us and through us in a very personal way as He relates to us through each person of the Trinity

The teaching of the Trinity instructs us that God is relational at the core of His being. One God, living in eternal fellowship with himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We may think interpersonal relationships just grow out of our contacts with one another. It goes much deeper than that:

We are relational beings, because, as our Old Testament Lesson told us, we were made in the image of a relational God.

In Genesis 1:26-27 we heard: *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness . . ." ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

The title of this message, **The Relational God**, is based on our Gospel Lesson from Matthew 28:16-20.

There is much in this brief passage that we will not explore this morning. It will be enough to focus on the relationship God intends for us through becoming disciples of Jesus Christ by baptism.

¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Let us pray . . . Almighty God, reveal to us the truth of who you are as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so that we may live with you in a loving relationship now and for eternity, in Jesus Name, Amen.

We are told in this Great Commission of Christ, to *go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

This is the command of our Lord which instituted baptism as a Sacrament, a holy act by which we receive God's saving grace.

By baptism God gives himself to us, gives us a new identity, and establishes a new relationship with us as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—One God, one Name, in three persons.

☐ God the Father

By baptism the Father becomes *our* Father and adopts us as his children (Galatians 3:26-27; 4:4-6; John 1:12-13; 1 John 3:1).

Galatians 4:4-6 (NIV) *⁴But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, ⁵to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. ⁶Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."*

You will notice, God does this as a Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Galatians 3:26-27 (NRSV)

²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. ²⁷As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

☐ Jesus, the Son of God

By baptism, the Son becomes our Redeemer, for we are baptized in union with his death (Romans 6:3-6) and cleansed by his blood to be his own (Ephesians

5:26; 1 John 1:7) and have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27), so that his righteousness is our glorious dress (Isaiah 61:10), and we become members of his body (Ephesians 5:30; 1 Corinthians 12:13)

Romans 6:3, 5 (NIV) *³Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? . . . ⁵If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.*

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (NIV) *¹². . . So it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body . . .*

Isaiah 61:10 (NIV)

I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness . . .

☐ The Holy Spirit

By baptism, the Holy Spirit becomes our Sanctifier (Romans 15:16)—who makes us holy; our Comforter or Counselor (John 14:16) and the guarantee (down payment) of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14; 2 Corinthians 1:22), we become his temple in which together with the father and the Son he dwells (1 Corinthians 3:16).

John 14:16 (KJV) *And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever;*

2 Corinthians 1:22 (NIV) [God] *set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*

1 Corinthians 3:16 (NIV)

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?

We are baptized into this new relationship with God. Drawn into union with the creator of the universe.

In the first church I pastored in Warren, Michigan, I woke up on Holy Trinity Sunday ready to preach on one God in three persons.

I picked up the newspaper on my way out the door. A glance at the headline arrested my attention:

89 Dead, 550 Injured In Rubble of Twisters

Overnight numerous tornados had ripped apart communities in the neighboring states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and Ontario, Canada. As I sat at my desk that morning, I laid the newspaper on top of the notes for my sermon.

I was prepared to preach, in exalted words, using my newly minted seminary degree, of the majesty and mystery of God as revealed in the Trinity.

But, as I perused the paper that morning, the sermon I had prepared sounded empty and hallow in the face of the tragedies I was now reading about.

I read the heart-rending account of a young mother, four months pregnant, who huddled against a wall in her fruit cellar, holding her six-year-old son, tightly in her arms.

The wall caved in as the tornado struck, *“it felt like the whole house crashed down on us,”* the woman said. *“I felt my little boy being crushed. He took two breaths and I knew he was dead. . . . He died in my arms. His head was resting right on my chin. I could smell his hair. I tried so hard to pick up that wall with my back. I couldn’t move a muscle. . . . I felt him take those two breaths. His neck was crushed against a table. So I just said, ‘go to sleep.’ I thought we were all going to be in heaven.”*

She was pinned under the rubble with her dead son for 30 minutes before neighbors dug her out.

Facing my congregation that morning, I read that account; confessing my dilemma to them I said,

Can any of us remain unmoved by this scene which happened to a young mother, not so different from many who are here this morning, only hours ago, and not so very far away.

And now (I said), it seems so inappropriate to preach to you in lofty language about the Holy Trinity.

God-in-three-persons—the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit—may seem like so much intellectual trivia in the face of such a tragedy.

What can I say about God that makes sense in the glaring light of today’s headline!

What I *can* say is this: We believe in a God who is NOT far off—unconcerned, unaffected, unattached from the headlines of today’s newspapers.

We do not believe in a God who remains hidden in the clouds . . . unseen, unfelt and unheard from by human beings like ourselves.

We believe in a God who *has* revealed Himself; who has *shown* Himself to us; who has appeared and was *heard* and *touched* and *seen* by men and women.

Who held children in his arms and blessed them.

God’s attitude toward our suffering is not just that of a distant deity, reigning in splendor and majesty, wrapped in mystery, incomprehensible to us mortals, unaffected by our misery; rather, the majestic and glorious God regarded our suffering as so important that he chose to become familiar with our sorrows, to take them upon himself, even suffering on a cross for us.

And that is the meaning of the Trinity. That God is the heavenly Father who made us and loves us; that God came to us in our suffering, incarnate in Jesus Christ; and that God is with us now in our suffering and loss and grief through the Holy Spirit—our comforter, our strength, our healer and our sanctifier—that is, the one who is working out all things that we might be holy.

In the work of salvation, God revealed himself as a Trinity.

In baptism, in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God gives us a new identity and brings us into an eternal relationship with himself—the Relational God who made us in His image.

Let us pray . . .

Benediction:

2 Corinthians 13:14 (ESV)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.