

Sermon Manuscript: John 16:12-15
Salvation Is the Work of the Triune God
TRINITY SUNDAY – June 12, 2022

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. [NIV]

As with other similar tragedies like the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, there have been many words spoken by many people offering their opinion on what could have been done differently and how to prevent such tragedies in the future. The fact is that no one who has not been in such circumstances can truly understand what it would be like to find themselves in the kind of situation that those helpless children and their teachers faced on that terrible day. For anyone to say something like, “If I had been there this is what I would have done,” is arrogant and ignorant. We all have the tendency to want to offer our opinion on matters about which we are not qualified to speak. It would be better if we kept our uninformed mouths shut and stuck to what we actually know.

“Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?” [Job 38:2] These are words that the LORD spoke to Job. Job had spent a long time speaking many words without knowledge and questioning God’s operation of his universe. The LORD spoke these words to humble Job and remind Job that he was not God and that there are many things that mere human beings cannot understand about God and his ways.

Today is Trinity Sunday. It is the day in the Church Year when we focus our attention on a truth about our God. That truth is that he is the Triune God. He is one God and yet three distinct persons. This is something that the Bible clearly teaches and that God reveals to us about himself. Yet we can’t comprehend what it means or how it can be. This is because our intellects and understanding are limited. God has only told us what we can grasp. The rest we must take on trust in him and simply honor him for who he is and what he does for us. As we consider Jesus’ words to us today, he speaks of all three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. From his words we see what the Trinity is most concerned about when it comes to us. It is the source of God’s glory. It is the most vital truth. It is the work of saving humankind from sin. **SALVATION IS THE WORK OF THE TRIUNE GOD.** The Father decreed it; the Son fulfilled it; and the Spirit proclaims it.

1. The Father Decreed It

God is responsible for all that he has made. So it was necessary for the Father to decree the salvation of the human race. God created all things and all things belong to him. Mankind is part of that creation. He loves what he has made. He hasn’t deserted us and left us to our sinfulness and rebellion. Instead he determined to recover us from sin. We belong to him and

he doesn't want to lose us. When the world fell into sin, it was the result of Adam's first sin. That sin led to the entire world being ruined by sin. Each of us has inherited sin from our first father. Paul explains in Romans: *Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, ... in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.* [Romans 5:12] God saw this coming and so he prepared a plan. Jesus prays in the next chapter of John: *Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.* [John 17:24] Paul teaches us: *(God) chose us in (Christ) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.* [Ephesians 1:4] And Peter says: *(Jesus) was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.* [1 Peter 1:20] God the Father was ready with his plan to rescue mankind for eternity.

The reason for this is all because of who God is. He is holy and just, first of all. That's how he created us. We were made without sin. But when we turned away, God's justice required that sin be punished. He cannot tolerate sin and must deal with it. But God is not only holy and just, he is also filled with gracious love. As John tells us: *God is love.* [1 John 4:8] Because of his love for us, the Father cannot let us perish. Instead his greatest desire is to save us. Paul says, *(God) wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.* [1 Timothy 2:4] This plan to save us and redeem all of his beloved human beings, together with his creation itself, is what Jesus calls "all that belongs to the Father" [verse 15] in our lesson today.

It is God the Father, as one person of the Trinity, that makes salvation possible. It is with him that creation originates. It is also with him that the will to redeem creation, together with all of us, also originates. But many people miss this as the primary will and work of the Father. Many over emphasize the work and person of God the Father. They do this when they make God into a generic power that rules and either judges or gives a pass to sin. When we think of God as this powerful being in the sky who hurls lightning bolts at the bad guys but should overlook my sins that I think of as little mistakes, this is a cartoon version of God. This is what false religions teach. Muslims believe in all-powerful Allah who must be appeased. But Allah also impotently overlooks wrong. This is what the American "civic religion" really is too. This is the generic god that people speak of. He is a god without Christ. He is a god who should smite our adversaries and bless nation without looking too closely at how we actually behave – particularly when it comes to my individual behavior. He should pretend that there is no sin or that it isn't too serious.

But this isn't the true God the Father. Such a view of God destroys the Trinity's work of salvation. It makes Christianity no different than Islam or any other pagan religion. It says that God should be good to me because I'm a pretty good person. This is a lie. We are sinners who have slapped God in the face over and over again and deserve only his wrath. We are only saved because the Father is gracious and loves us even though we don't deserve it. We are only saved because he has decreed a single plan of salvation that is fulfilled in his Son, Jesus Christ alone. To believe anything different is to leave out the other persons of the Trinity. But

salvation is the work of Father, Son and Spirit. Not only has the Father decreed salvation but the Son has fulfilled it.

2. The Son Fulfilled It

Jesus is the one through whom the Father's decree was carried out. Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. He is God the Son. Paul tells the Colossians: *In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.* [Colossians 2:9] And John says: *We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true — even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.* [1 John 5:20] True God became true man in order to carry out the Father's decree for our salvation. God needed to become human first so that he could fulfill the Father's just demand for sinless righteousness. He also needed become human so he could suffer the just punishment for our sins as our substitute. God needed to become one of us so he could stand in our place and remove sin. Christ kept God's laws for us and died our death for us and so became our perfect substitute. This is the marvelous truth at the center of "all truth." This is the glory given to Christ by the Father. This is why we love and praise Jesus!

In order for this to be effective, the Son needed to be human but also remain true God. His work of redeeming the world could only be sufficient to save everyone if Jesus was both true man and true God. If Jesus were only a human being, how would his death be any different than yours or mine? Jesus was different because he is also the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. The proof of this is seen in his resurrection at Easter. Only God could raise himself from the dead. Only God could fulfill the work needed for our salvation. And Jesus is the one who did it! This is the source of the Son's glory. Jesus tells us here in our text that the Spirit *"will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you."* [verse 14] What the Spirit made known to the disciples and what he makes known to us is that Jesus is the Son of God from all eternity. As God he has fulfilled the work of salvation for us all.

It is only God the Son who could fulfill our salvation. We need the work of the Son and that's why we confess the Trinity as we do today with the Athanasian Creed. There are many who deny that Jesus is truly God, the second person of the Trinity. The men who originally wrote the Athanasian Creed were refuting people in their day who said that Jesus wasn't really God but only a creation of God.

Today there are still those who teach this. Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons claim to be Christians. But in truth they deny the Trinity and deny that Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. They deny that he is the true God. They take away the One who is both God and man who is necessary for our salvation.

And there are those whose view of Scripture is "modern" and "liberal" who would deny the proofs of Christ's divinity in his miracles, especially his resurrection. They also rob people of the precious Son of God who lived among us and gave himself for us. They rob the world of Immanuel, "God with us."

Such denials of Jesus' Godhead make salvation impossible. If Jesus is no different than we are, our salvation depends only on ourselves. Either it depends on us to save ourselves for this life by making this world a better place. This is called the social gospel of liberal "Christianity." Or it depends on us to save ourselves for eternity. This is the message of the cults, which teach we are saved by our own good works. What we really need and the only true hope we have is that salvation is a free gift decreed by God the Father and fulfilled completely for us by God the Son. This truth of this good news is than proclaimed by the Holy Spirit.

3. The Spirit Proclaims It

The Holy Spirit's work is to make sure that the Trinity's plan of salvation is proclaimed to the world. He proclaims the truth of God. That truth begins with God's law that condemns our sinfulness. But it goes on to the sweet message that forgiveness doesn't depend on us. Instead it has been accomplished by the Son. This is the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who tells the story of all that the Father decreed and that the Son fulfilled. He is like a narrator who recalls the heroes who have sacrificed on missions to save others. But the hero he describes is the greatest one of all. The Father planned the mission. The Son carried out the mission. The Spirit reports the mission.

The truth the Spirit proclaims is found in his precious revelation, the Holy Scriptures. It is there that he has plainly recorded for us what the work of the Holy Trinity truly is. It is through the good news of the gospel in the Word and the Sacraments that the Spirit accomplishes his work in us. The Word is the Holy Spirit's domain where he brings the divine work of salvation to us. Paul teaches us: *Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.* **[Romans 10:17]** When people here this Word they trust in the work of Jesus for them and they find salvation.

The Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Trinity, proclaims the way of salvation to us. Many overemphasize the Spirit and miss what his true purpose is. There are those who focus attention on the signs of the Spirit such as speaking in tongues that draw attention away from the Word with Christ at the center. The emphasis is put onto what people feel and do. There are others who speak vaguely of being "spiritual" without any real foundation in the certainty of Scripture. Instead it becomes a collection of feelings and superstitions from one's own mind. Both lead to the hopelessness of depending on one's self and one's feelings instead of on the sure Word of God which the Spirit gives us. This leaves out the gracious certainty of forgiveness that is found in our Savior Jesus Christ and the Spirit's Word that proclaims it to us.

This is why we worship the one true God, the Triune God. He is the only God and he has revealed who he is in his holy Word. He is one God and he is also three persons. This is the teaching of Scripture. Even though we cannot fully comprehend this truth about God, he has told us this about himself. He has shown us in his Word that this marvelous God has made it his main work to save us from sin and save us for himself. All three persons – Father, Son and Spirit – work together to make our salvation possible. We may not be able to understand how the Trinity works, but we can and, by grace do, believe that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have worked our salvation. Amen.