

### Pentecost Living

*Jesus invites us into the life of the Triune God*

.....**John 15: 26 – 16:15**.....

***“When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. <sup>27</sup>And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning. <sup>16:1</sup>All this I have told you so that you will not go astray... <sup>5</sup>Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ <sup>6</sup>Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief, <sup>7</sup>But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>8</sup>When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: <sup>9</sup>in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; <sup>10</sup>in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; <sup>11</sup>and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. <sup>12</sup>I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. <sup>15</sup>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.”*.....**

Last Sunday, on Pentecost, we wore our red and gave thanks to God for the ways He fills our lives with the Holy Spirit. Because of His gift of the Holy Spirit, we who trust in His Son, Jesus, are able to have God always *with* us and *in* us, every single day.

Today, on this Trinity Sunday, we celebrate being invited into the life of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

For thousands of years, brilliant theologians have tried to explain how God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are all one (1) in God. No human being, this side of Heaven, is able to fully understand how God can be three (3) persons and yet one (1) God. But we believe it, because we have experienced God at work through all three members of God’s Trinity.

Throughout history, many kinds of symbols have been used to represent the unity of the Holy Spirit. In Scripture, the number three (3) represents divine perfection. As we sang in our opening hymn, the three words, ‘*Holy, Holy, Holy,*’ repeated together, represent the total perfection of God. These are the words the Prophet Isaiah heard in the Heavenly Throne Room of God, being sung by the seraphim. (*Isaiah 6:1*)

Still today, the number three (3) carries the idea of ultimate achievement. In horseracing it’s the ‘*trifecta*’ and in hockey, it’s the ‘hat trick’.

The relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is pictured many ways. This beautiful church window shows the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in three interconnected circles. (show slide) The Father is at the top, symbolized by His right hand, which indicates authority, with the

words, 'Abba', which is Aramaic for 'Father', and the Hebrew holy name for God, 'Yahweh'. Notice the sign made by God's hand, forming the symbol of the Trinity.

The Son, Jesus, is depicted as the sacrificial lamb, who has redeemed the world of sin. The Christian flag and his cross are held by the Lamb, who stands on a royal platform. The Holy Spirit is pictured as a dove, which is what the Holy Spirit looked like as He came to rest upon Jesus during his baptism.

These three interlocking circles have come to represent the Trinity, (show slide) and are sometimes connected by a triangle, which symbolizes the equal relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one at each corner.

Sometimes the Trinity is represented by a trefoil knot, (show slide) called the '*Triquetra*' (*Tri-Qweh-Trah*). This design is particularly associated Celtic (Kel-tic) Christianity. The unbroken, interconnected loops symbolize the separate, yet co-equal, interrelationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The inter-twining circle symbolizes the eternal unity which binds them all together.

When I was researching the Trinity, I found that many religions and philosophies embrace symbols that look like this one with some slight variations, but they *do not all* represent the Trinitarian God. So, if you find yourself wanting jewelry or artwork with this design, make sure that the symbol you like really means what you hope it does!

For Christians, our life finds its meaning within this circle of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. When we feel like we're drifting without an anchor or trying to salvage the pieces of our lives, we find purpose and strength; hope and love within the Trinity.

Just like someone who is escorted into the presence of a king, Jesus gives us access into the Trinity through faith in him. The Apostle Paul puts it this way: "*Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently look forward to sharing God's glory.*" (Romans 5:2-1-3)

Just like those maps at the mall or on the turnpike that have an arrow that helps you find where you are; that says, '*you are here*,' if you trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then you 'are there', smack dab in the middle of the knot, in the middle of the Holy Trinity. To be able to cope with all the stuff that comes with everyday life, you need every single person of the Trinity.

Two Sundays ago, the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette ran a front-page article which featured the decline of faith in our country<sup>1</sup>. It continued into the center of the paper, filling up two entire pages. The article highlighted the latest Gallup Poll, which revealed that for the first time in their 80 years of research, the percentage of American adults who belong to a religious congregation has fallen below 50% (to 47%).

The people who were spotlighted in the article seemed to me, fairly representative of the current cultural trend, which applauds designing your own spirituality that best suits your personality.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Smith, '*Majority in U.S. Belong to No Religion*,' Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, May 16, 2021, Vol. 94, No. 298.  
Burgettstown Presbyterian Church

One by one, the people interviewed said that they left their churches because their needs weren't being satisfied. As I read their stories, in which they celebrated their individuality and creative expressions of faith, I could only see impending heartbreak.

According to the Gallup Poll, the majority *'religion'* in our country right now is *'secularism'*, which elevates human reasoning over God's truth as the basis of morality and decision-making. Through close examination, however, secularism ends up really being worship of the human ego.

As I read the article, Paul's words to the church in Rome kept echoing in my head. Way back then, Paul must have seen the same reasoning circulating through society. He wrote, ***"For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ... and exchanged the truth of God for a lie. (Romans 1:20 – 25)***

To turn away from the Church is one thing, but to turn away from Jesus, is tragic. In their experimentation and exercise of personal choice, so many people turn their back on the only source of true life, the Triune God.

It's very common to hear people say, *'Oh, I believe in God, just not in Jesus or the Christian God.'* Some people feel like they're being *'inclusive'* or big-hearted when they reject the *'Christian God'* as too limited to include all of the various cultures of the earth. The opposite is actually true.

In our reading from John this morning, Jesus said that God's ***'Spirit of Truth'*** will convict the (entire) world of their wrong thinking and point them to answers for all their questions about the source of Truth. Jesus also said that he came ***'not to condemn the world but to save the world through him.'*** (John 3:16)

In their search for Truth, so many people fail to see it right in front of them. It's like going out on a search for buried treasure when the treasure chest was at the front door, clearly marked with a big 'X', all along. The God who created the universe has revealed the Truth about Himself in the Bible. And it is only in the Bible that we learn how God reaches out to draw us into His circle of love.

I must admit, however, that this newspaper article pointed out a real need in the practice of our faith. Today, people want transparent faith; a faith that is practical and relevant, and rightly so. Through our churches, people should have the opportunity to learn how to connect personally to God and receive His love and truth into their hearts.

Even though many people today see the Bible as an ancient, irrelevant book written by un-enlightened and superstitious people, the Bible alone reveals God's Wisdom and Truth. In the Bible, we are able to witness how God has worked in human lives throughout history. We

see evidence, beginning with His Creation of the world, that God isn't at all aloof or hard to find. Rather, we see that God has graciously disclosed Himself to us, because His goal is to share His holy life with us.

That God would want to do this is totally remarkable, because compared to Him, we are lowly, mortal creatures, not at all holy. But in the Bible, we learn that God has made a way for us to cancel the consequences of sin and make the choice to join Him for all of eternity.

In today's Old Testament reading from Proverbs 8, Solomon prophesied that God would pour out His Wisdom on everyone who truly seeks it. God's Wisdom doesn't soak into us through New Age mantras or alternative spirituality. That voice is *not* God's. The only way to tap into the power behind the universe is through faith in God's Son, Jesus. God's Wisdom only comes to us through the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity.

The Holy Spirit is an **'Advocate,'** like Jesus himself, who is a constant Companion and support for all of Jesus' followers. Some translations of the Bible call the Holy Spirit a **'Comforter,'** or a **'Counselor.'**

Jesus called the Holy Spirit, the **'Spirit of truth,'** because the Holy Spirit is God's teacher who comes to live in the heart and soul and mind of everyone, young or old, rich or poor, smart or not, who places their life under the Lordship of Jesus.

Paul reminds us in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, that by the Holy Spirit, we are able to understand the **'deep things of God,'** and we are able to see the folly of our own ways of thinking. (1 Corinthians 2: 6-16). God's ways are **'foolishness'** to humans without the aid of the Holy Spirit, who seals God's reality upon our hearts. John calls the teaching of the Holy Spirit an **'anointing'** which teaches individuals what is Truth and what it is not. (1 John 3:27)

Jesus showed us a little of what the relationship of the three persons of the Trinity is like. When he lived on earth, Jesus always deferred to *'his Father in Heaven'* on all decisions. He spent hours and hours with his Father in prayer to learn what the Father wanted him to do.

Jesus also relied on God's Spirit to provide the power and wisdom he needed every single moment of every single day. When Jesus, who was pre-existent in Heaven with God, was born in human form to the virgin Mary, he willingly **'emptied himself'** (ESV). He **'gave up his divine privileges'** (NLT), so that he could live a holy, sinless life as a human, in our place.

When Jesus was baptized, God filled him with the Holy Spirit, and by relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was victorious to achieve our salvation.

God the Father, God's Son and God's Holy Spirit, all worked together in their own roles to make it possible for us to live with God forever in His Kingdom. They are still at work for us right now.

Jesus' mission to earth was to offer us the choice of where we will spend eternity. For those who seek life, true life, that lasts for eternity, God sends His Wisdom into their heart and mind. Jesus said, **'If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him.'** (John 14:23)

I'm not sure we grasp how incredibly amazing it is that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit come to live *inside* everyone who believes in Jesus as Savior and Lord! As Peter wrote, '***we become partakers of the divine nature.***' (1 Peter 1: 3-4)

Sealed by the Holy Spirit into the Holy Trinity, we are given a new identity as a family member, and unimaginable privileges. We receive abundant blessings as one of God's own children.

If you can picture yourselves within the circle of the Trinity, it will make all the difference in how you live life. Living by the power of God at work in you, you are equipped to deal with life's ups and downs. The small upsets seem ever smaller because your focal point is God, not worrying about what others think of you.

Within that circle, you find your storm shelter. There you also find acceptance and the conviction of faith to bring others into the circle.

I close with several stanzas of an ancient prayer from St. Patrick, who brought Christianity to the Irish. These are the words, in part, of the prayer prayed by St Patrick as he faced the challenges of each new day. He imagined putting on a spiritual breastplate of armor - the strength of the Trinity.

*"I bind unto myself today, The strong Name of the Trinity,  
By invocation of the same, The Three in One and One in Three.  
I bind unto myself today, The power of God to hold and lead,  
His eye to watch, His might to stay, His ear to hearken to my need.  
The wisdom of my God to teach, His hand to guide, His shield to ward;  
The word of God to give me speech, His heavenly host to be my guard.  
Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me,  
Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me.  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.  
I bind unto myself the Name, The strong Name of the Trinity,  
By invocation of the same, The Three in One and One in Three.  
By Whom all nature hath creation, Eternal Father, Spirit, Word:  
Praise to the Lord of my salvation, Salvation is of Christ the Lord."*

My prayer is that we never lose sight of the incredible privilege of being adopted and loved by the Trinitarian God in whom we live each and every moment of our lives: claimed, rescued, and loved.

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