

Trinity at Trinity

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Date: 22 May 2016

[0:00] Amen. Well, brothers and sisters, we are here.

Amen. By the grace of God, the first and major stage of the renovation that started when this building was purchased over a year ago is complete.

We are upstairs. Finally! Now think for a minute of the Lord's kindness to this community of believers.

What started as a home fellowship comprised of a number of dedicated and gifted lay leaders grew into a congregation that met in a series of rented spaces. And now here we are today.

A congregation with a place to call home. A congregation that is flourishing by the grace of God with new opportunities to serve the Lord, one another, and our community.

[1:39] How awesome is that? And to think, the Church of the Holy Trinity is having its first worship service in its renovated space on Trinity Sunday.

We couldn't have planned something so incredible. If we had planned it, it probably wouldn't have happened. Not only is Trinity Sunday an important day in the Church's calendar, it is, of course, of particular importance to this congregation, given our name and our identity.

And I think for a moment on Trinity Sunday's past. Because what is a joyful thing for me today, I have to admit, Trinity Sunday was once a matter of fear and trembling for me.

When I was a seminarian in homiletics class, when we talked about preaching, we talked about the joys and challenges of preaching the major feasts of the Church calendar.

Now, Trinity Sunday was the one we were prepared to fear the most. Because quite honestly, the doctrine of the Trinity provides one of the most difficult sermon topics ever.

[2:59] Our instructor joked with us that when we became curates, newly ordained priests who serve as assistants in congregations, we would be given the task of preaching on Trinity Sunday because our bosses wouldn't want to do it.

I laughed at the time. Then I became a curate and found myself preaching on Trinity Sunday. Wasn't quite as funny anymore.

Now, I went into my first Trinity Sunday sermon determined to give it my best. So throughout the sermon, I kept asking the congregation if they were following me. They kept shaking their heads and saying, no, not really.

Somehow, by the grace of God, it all came together in the end and everyone was edified. And I remembered that day that God's strength is made perfect in weakness.

Now, fortunately for you, the special occasion that we're celebrating today has spared you from being subjected at my hands to a long discourse on the doctrine of the Trinity.

[4:04] You should probably count your blessings. What I do want to emphasize on this Trinity Sunday, though, is my hope that this building, this space, will be a place where the triune God will be worshipped in spirit and in truth for many years to come.

You know, as I was thinking about us dedicating our new space, the description of the glory of the Lord filling the temple that King Solomon had constructed came to mind.

In 1 Kings 8, we see the Ark of the Covenant brought into the newly built and furnished temple. In verses 10 and 11, we see what happens after the Ark is brought in.

When the priest came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priest could not stand to minister because of the cloud.

For the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord. Brothers and sisters, God's power, God's presence, and God's glory filled that place.

[5:17] And that struck me. Because I pray that this is a place where God's glory, God's presence, and God's power will be known mightily.

I expect that it will be. But there is something of a warning when we consider what eventually happened after the construction of the temple.

King Solomon, led astray by his wives, and eventually turned his heart after false gods. His loyalty to the one true God of Israel was no longer exclusive.

Now Solomon's idolatry set off a downward spiral that ultimately resulted many years later in the temple that had once been filled with the glory of God being destroyed by the Babylonians.

Now that is a sobering warning for the church in our day. This sort of thing isn't confined to ancient history.

[6:23] There are churches, most of us know of some of them, that were built to the glory of God, that were filled with God's presence, that are now empty shells of what they once were.

Now they're empty. They're filled with falsehood. What happened? We only have to look at the example of Solomon to get a sense of what happened.

The people developed divided loyalties. Loyalty to the one true God, the triune God, in those places eroded over time. Like Solomon, who was influenced by the pagan culture of his wives, these churches led outside influences.

Usurp their loyalty to the one true God. Usurp their loyalty to the one true God. And we trust that that will not happen here. This community where so many have sacrificed so much to stay loyal to God's truth.

We trust that God will preserve his presence, preserve his people, and that this place will continue to be filled with the glory of the gospel.

[7:39] That God, by his grace, will keep us focused. What is the foundation? What the focus, this congregation, this church, this space ought to be?

Reminded of what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2. I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

In this community, in this space, let's commit ourselves by God's grace to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified. That is the gospel.

The gospel is something that must never be compromised here. It must never be compromised by the worship of false gods.

It must never be compromised by false gospels. False gospels that are not about salvation through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. False gospels that are grounded in something other than what God has revealed to us in his holy word.

[9:08] False gospels that are not about salvation through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. This is a place that is meant to be filled with the glory of God and will be filled with the glory of God so long as the gospel is central here.

Thank God, my brothers and sisters, that where the gospel is believed, where it's preached, where it's taught, where it is the center of fellowship, the glory, the presence, and the power of God will be found.

And it is our awesome privilege to have fellowship with God and with one another in the truth in this place. As I was preparing for this sermon, thinking on the glory of God, about his presence with us, a reading from Isaiah 6 for this morning really struck me with its vision of the throne of God.

Now, historically, churches have often been designed to look basically like throne rooms. Because we have the awesome privilege of going before the throne of God in worship.

The awesome privilege of being in his presence through the power of the Holy Spirit. We see Isaiah's encounter before the throne of God.

[10:27] And we see in it a pattern for our own encounter with God as we draw near to him in worship. So what does that pattern tell us? What does it mean for us as a worshiping community?

What does it tell us about what should be happening in this space in which we will be worshiping from now on? Well, let's look briefly at these verses.

Isaiah 6, starting in verse 1. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple.

Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings. With two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. One called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is filled with his glory. And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called. And the house was filled with smoke.

[11:33] What a striking series of images we have in these verses. It's a description that is both awe-inspiring and more than a little terrifying.

As we'll see in the next few verses, Isaiah feels more than a little uncomfortable here, because he's a sinner in the presence of a holy God. But to get the full sense of what these verses mean for us as we worship, as we draw near to the throne of God, we have to look at it through a New Testament lens.

This fearful imagery is pretty powerfully transformed when we consider Jesus, our great high priest, interceding for us before the throne of the Father. Because of Jesus, we get this instruction in Hebrews 4.16.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Brothers and sisters, may this be a place where we are in awe at the holiness of God, but also where we draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, trusting in the blood of Jesus, receiving mercy and grace in the presence of our God.

That awesome God who is high and lifted up is awe-inspiring in his holiness, but we can draw near through Jesus, our high priest, and isn't that amazing?

[13:08] May that be what we do in this place week after week and year after year. So may this be a place where people enter into the presence of God, just as Isaiah did.

May it also be a place where people say what Isaiah said in the presence of God, and where people receive what Isaiah received. Back in our passage, I said, Woe is me, for I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said, Behold, this has touched your lips.

Your guilt is taken away. Your sin is atoned for. My brothers and sisters, may this be a place where we see and confess our sins.

And may conviction of sin draw us to Christ. May this be a place where those of unclean lips, those burdened with sin, come to know their need of a Savior, and are driven to God's mercy in Jesus.

[14:34] The flaming coal from the altar is used to make Isaiah clean, to take away his guilt, to atone for his sins, and this is to remind us that the sacrificial blood of the Lamb of God can take away the guilt of even the guiltiest of us.

It atones for the sins of even the chief of sinners who repents. It can make us clean no matter how filthy we are. The saving power of the blood of Jesus changes lives.

Does it change your life? It saves us from the guilt and the power of sin. May the saving power of the blood of Jesus be known in this place, now and always.

May our lives be changed here through the power and the proclamation of the gospel of grace. May this be a place where our lives, having been changed, we are called and equipped for ministry.

May we be sent from this place to bear witness to the gospel, to share the amazing love of Jesus Christ, to be a light to our community and to our city. We see our model in verse 8.

[15:58] I heard the voice of the Lord saying, Whom shall I send? And who will go for us? Then I said, Here I am. Send me. Now Isaiah was not taken into God's presence and didn't have his guilt taken away simply for his own sake.

Now he was being equipped and prepared to be sent. He was sent to people who were hostile. This ended up, in one sense, not going so well for him.

But having been prepared in the presence of God, he was able to endure faithfully. And we will be sent from this place to people who are often hostile, but are always hurting, who have no hope and are without God.

Only if our fellowship with one another is grounded in the gospel, only if we are grounded in the gospel, will we be prepared to do what God is sending us to do?

To reach out to those who are lost as we once were. To demonstrate God's love to them. To share the gospel with them. Are we determined to be equipped to do that here in fellowship with one another?

[17:29] Here, in the space dedicated to the worship of our almighty triune God, may we know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

May the gospel drive everything that we do. May the gospel permeate every aspect of our lives.

May the gospel transform our hearts and renew our minds.

Is that what we are determined to be about here? Yes? Yes. We can't do what we have been called to do in this place in our own power.

But God's power has no limit. Not only is he omnipotent, all-powerful, he is good, he is loving, and we can trust him. He will accomplish the plans that he has for us.
So we thank our God for the amazing things he has done and will do, and we say, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.
[18 : 40] In the name of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Spirit. Amen.