

Trinity Sunday

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 May 2010

Preacher: Rev. Jim Salladin

[0 : 00] Hello, everybody. Well done. Boy, we've made lots of progress.

All right. Let's pray together as we begin. Almighty God, we just said that we believe in one God, and we believe at the same time we call you Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And Father, I praise you for the ways that when we look at that creed that we just confess together, as we say we believe in God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, along with that comes the gospel, the good news.

And we thank you as Christians. We thank you so much for who you are. We thank you that you are one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And we ask that your Holy Spirit will be with us because we need your Holy Spirit.

So we're going to be thinking about things that are beyond our capacity to understand. And so we need your resources to help us to understand, but also, Father, to receive your love.

[1 : 21] And that's my prayer for us now, that we would hear rightly and receive truly your love. In Jesus' name. Amen. All right. Well, Aaron has told us earlier that today is a holiday.

It's Trinity Sunday. I don't think it's a holiday that you get any time off for. So, you know, it's not exciting in that regard. And I bet for a lot of us here, it's not even a holiday that you even knew was a holiday.

I mean, you know. But just like Aaron was saying, over the course of the Christian calendar, we have these special days set aside to commemorate certain things.

So we've got Christmas and Easter and Pentecost. Pentecost was last week. And for the most part, the Christian calendar rehearses the historical events of Jesus' life or just after Jesus ascended to heaven.

So Christmas recounts his birth. Easter, his death and resurrection. Pentecost, after he ascended, he sent the Holy Spirit upon us.

[2 : 37] But Trinity Sunday is a little bit different because it's not a day in which we commemorate a historical event. It's a day in which we commemorate a theological doctrine.

And it's the theological doctrine that more than anything else distinguishes Christianity from everybody else.

There's lots of differences between Christianity and other religions. But the difference that is most striking is the doctrine of the Trinity.

Christianity teaches this kind of mind-blowing idea that on the one hand, God is one.

I mean, we're very, very clear that we're monotheists, right? There is one true God. And yet, at the same time, the Bible is very clear that one true God exists eternally as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

[3 : 36] And God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit are distinct from each other. But they're not separate from each other. In some mysterious way that blows our mind, and if you think about it too much, you'll get headaches and things like that.

But God is completely one and very, very, very truly three persons. Now, no other religion says anything close to that.

And for a lot of us, I think there's a temptation to kind of ignore the Trinity. Or to not spend a lot of time thinking about the Trinity.

I mean, I don't know when the last time there was a sermon on the Trinity, even around here. And part of the temptation to ignore the Trinity has to do with a couple things.

One is it's just a really hard concept. I mean, it's hard, and so it's easier not to think about it, you know. But another issue is that it's actually quite offensive to a lot of people.

[4 : 43] Particularly Islam and Judaism, historically, have been just terribly, terribly, terribly offended. That Christians will say, on the one hand, there is one true God, and on the other hand, he exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And so, you know, it's a hard doctrine to understand. It offends a lot of people. I think that brings up a good question. And the question it brings up for me is, why bother? You know, why bother giving attention to this doctrine?

I mean, why focus on the one thing that, above anything else, divides Christianity from all other religions? Wouldn't it make more sense to emphasize the things that, you know, bring the different religions together?

A lot of times people will say that, you know, all religions teach that we should love each other, for instance. Wouldn't it make more sense for us to focus on that and maybe the golden rule, rather than on a hard doctrine that offends people and separates Christianity from everybody else?

It's a good question. But here's the thing. And here's at least part of the reason why the Trinity is so utterly, completely important to us as Christians.

[6 : 02] And it's actually critically, critically important to the entire world. The doctrine of the Trinity is the key to really living out the golden rule.

I mean, we all know that we should love each other. We all know that we should treat other people the way we want to be treated. But we also all know, if we are honest, and I hope you are, we also know that we're terrible at it.

We're terrible at loving people. And, you know, unless they don't irritate us. Like, we love people that are fun to love, but we don't love people that aren't fun to love. It's true that loving each other is of critical, critical importance in the life of the Christian.

But the thing that gives life to the Christian's love is the doctrine of the Trinity. The life of Christian love for each other only works because of the Trinity.

That's what I want to show you tonight. Okay. We're looking at the first reading, and we're looking at the last verse of the first reading. 2 Corinthians, chapter 13, verse 14.

[7 : 22] Now, a lot of us will know this verse. We say it oftentimes at the end of our services. And it's all about the Trinity. We often call it the grace. It's the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Now, there's three components to it. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. I want to zero in. I'm going to start with the middle one, the love of God. Now, my guess is that a lot of us here, probably almost all of us here, are pretty comfortable with the idea that God is a loving God. I think that's true even if you're not a Christian and maybe even if you're not even religious.

I think most people think if there is a God, then at least we hope he's a loving God. But Christianity actually says more than that. The Bible says more than that.

The Bible says not just that God is a loving kind of God. The Bible says that God is love.

[8 : 31] It doesn't say it in this verse, but we read it earlier. I don't know whether you caught it. Right after the call for purity, we read together from 1 John chapter 4. And all together, we said those three amazing words.

God is love. And the remarkable thing is, according to the scriptures, it's not just that love is not just what God is like.

According to scriptures, there's something bigger going on. Love is who God is. Now, what does that mean? It means at least this.

It means at least that God is a relationship. Now, this is where our minds begin to burst.

I'll try to explain this as best I can. The Bible indicates that for all eternity past, God has, from all eternity past, God has always been, is, and always will be a relationship of perfect love.

[9 : 40] So God, the Father, for all eternity past, has been pouring out his love upon God, the Son. We know him as Jesus Christ. And for all eternity past, the Son has been reflecting that love back to the Father.

And that exchange of love between the Father and the Son happens through the Holy Spirit. So somehow, in a remarkable way, one God is also at the same time a perfect relationship.

The Father loving the Son through the Spirit. The Son reflecting that love back to the Father through the Spirit. And one of the things that that means, if it's true that this God, this Father, Son, and Holy Spirit created all that there is, then it is also true that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Trinity, is the

source of all love that ever exists anywhere in the world.

The ultimate source of love is God. And it also means that God designed you and I to participate in that love. Now, I don't know if I, I might have lost you there for a second, but come back now. This explains something very, very important about you and me. This explains why you and I absolutely crave real relationships.

[11:10] Authentic, loving relationships. Why do I say that? The Bible says that humanity was created in the image of God, right? Which, among other things, means that in some respect, human beings work like God works.

At least in some respects. And the Trinity, we were designed by the Trinity. And so in some respects, we reflect the Trinity's nature.

Which means, at least, that we were designed to live in and, in a sense, live on the love that exists between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We were designed for it.

We were wired for it. And that's why Paul, when he ends his letter to, to the Corinthians, his prayer, his, his deepest desire for the Corinthians is that they would be a people who would know the love of God.

That they would know the love that the Father has been always pouring out upon the Son and the Son reflecting back upon the Father through the Spirit. It's Paul's deepest prayer for the Christian.

[12:18] And it's our deepest need as human beings. A few years ago, there was a movie called Into the Wild. Did anybody watch the movie Into the Wild?

Yeah, it's a very interesting movie. I don't know how true, it's kind of based on a true story. I'm not exactly sure how accurate it is. But it's a really interesting movie.

It has a great soundtrack by Eddie Vedder. If you were into Pearl Jam back in the early 90s, you should definitely get the album. But anyways, the movie's about a guy called Christopher McCandless.

And this guy, Christopher McCandless, graduated from university in the early 90s. And he gives up all his possessions after graduating from a prestigious university.

He gives away all his money. And he goes off in search of real existence. What he calls real existence. Kind of authentic living. And what ends up happening is he goes and he lives in the, often the wild of Alaska.

[13:23] And I find it to be just a fascinating film, but it's also profoundly tragic. Because at the beginning of the movie, you're really, really compelled by this guy.

I mean, he's Christopher McCandless. He's idealistic. He's visionary. He's compelling. I mean, halfway through the movie, I wanted to throw away everything and go live in the endowment lands, you know.

And in a pup tent or something like that. Like, you know, it's really compelling. But as the story goes, excuse me, McCandless systematically cuts himself off from all relationships in his life. He cuts himself off from his family, from his sister, from his friends, everything. Until at the, you know, as the movie advances, he becomes completely isolated.

And there's this moment when he's all alone. He's starving. He's freezing. And he realizes something. He writes something down in his journal.

[14:37] He writes down, happiness is only real when it is shared. Which is another way of saying, happiness is only real when it's in the context of love and relationship.

And it's a terribly tragic moment in the movie because as the viewer, you're looking at this guy and you see him starving. But you realize all of a sudden that he's, it's not just a lack of food that is making him starve.

He's freezing, but it's not just because he's cold. The thing that he really needs, the thing he really needs is the thing he's been rejecting all along. It's relationship and it's love.

And at that moment, he realizes that he's gotten it all wrong. Happiness is only real when it is shared in the context of love.

And so it brings up a question. Excuse me. Why is it that we humans, I mean most of us know that we humans, we need love and we need good relationships every bit as well, as much as we need food.

[15:49] Just every bit as much as we need food. We need love and true relationships. Why is that the case? Why is it that every one of us here knows that if you went off into the middle of the Alaska wilderness by yourself, eventually you would go mad?

Why? According to scripture, it's because of the Trinity. It's because we were designed by the Trinity.

We were designed by the Trinity to work like the Trinity works. And we will starve and we will freeze and we will die spiritually until we share that love with God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So that's what we need. How do we do it? How do we do it? How does it happen? If it's true that we are designed to share the love of the Trinity, then how do we share in that love?

Two things. Number one, we've got to see God's love. And we see God's love displayed in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, particularly on the cross.

[16:55] First, we've got to see God's love. But the second thing is we've got to receive his love. And that happens through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. First of all, we've got to see God's love.

And that happens through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me ask you a question. How do you know whether someone loves you? Some of you who are dating or want to be dating are asking that question all the time.

But what are the indications that someone, I don't mean really romantically, but how do you know if someone truly loves you in a more than just a superficial way?

One of the key things. One of the key things. One of the key things. One of the key things. One of the key things. You know someone truly loves you if they are willing to suffer with you.

Isn't that true? Because it's easy to do fun things together. You don't have to have a close relationship to do fun things together.

[17:58] But it takes something deeper. It takes something like love for two people to walk together through times of great difficulty and great suffering. Now that's exactly the way the Trinity displayed his love for you and I.

The Trinity displays his love, proves his love for you and I by suffering for us. The Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit displays his love and offers his love to you and I through showing us the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through the cross of Christ. Imagine yourself, imagine Christopher McClendous again. And imagine for a second that you're in his situation.

You're utterly alone. You've cut yourself off from all human contact. You're starving. You're freezing. And worse than that, you've come to the realization that the worst pain a human being could possibly experience is utter and complete isolation.

And that's exactly what you're experiencing. Now according to the Bible, that is a perfect picture of the fundamental human problem. We talk about sin in the Bible and in Christianity.

[19:19] And sin is isolation that results from rejecting God and rejecting other people. We were created for God's love, but we continually isolate ourselves from it.

The Trinity's love is so serious and so generous that God the Father planned to send his son, God the Son, to in a sense go looking for us in the wilderness of our sinful isolation.

God the Son went looking for us by becoming a man. God the Son went looking for us not just by becoming a man, but ultimately by hanging upon a cross.

And when Jesus hung upon the cross, he was experiencing total isolation. Everybody and all humans had rejected him. The vast majority at least.

There was a few that stuck with him. But for the most part, he was isolated from humanity. And he was isolated from God at that point. And you realize that the magnitude of the cross, because the eternal Son of God, who for all eternity knew a perfect relationship for the first time, for the only moments of history that will ever be this way, the eternal Son of God knew utter relational isolation and the absence of God's love.

[20:42] Horrible suffering. It wasn't the physical pain that was so bad. It was that relational pain that was so horrible. But the Son of God, looking for us in the wilderness of our isolation, in order that he could take our place there, so that we could come home to the Father's fellowship.

Now, I say all that to illustrate that that's what the Trinity means by love. It's not fluffy. It's not sentimental. It's sacrificial.

And a lot of times people will say, I believe in a God of love. But the question that comes up for me is, does the God of love you believe in love you enough to suffer for you? To my knowledge, no other religion claims that.

Nothing other than the Trinity will claim that. And that's why the Trinity, the Trinity must be the most trustworthy view of God that humanity has ever conceived. Or not that we conceived it, that we've

ever heard of.

So the love of God is displayed in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. But then the love of God is received through the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

[21 : 59] Remember what McClendish said, happiness is only real when it is shared. And there's a remarkable way with the Trinity that somehow, I hope I'm not irreverent to say this, but somehow, in a mysterious way, that same reality is true of God.

God takes joy in sharing His love with others. First and foremost, the Father takes joy in sharing love with the Son. And the Son takes joy in returning that love to the Father.

And all of that is facilitated through the Holy Spirit. But the Trinity takes joy in sharing that love out with you and I. And the way that happens is that the Holy Spirit is sent to our hearts, sent into our minds, and the Holy Spirit does at least kind of a two-stroke action.

The Holy Spirit directs our eyes, our attention, our minds, to gaze upon the cross of Christ and to see the love of God displayed in Jesus.

But then at the same moment, the Holy Spirit is ministering to our hearts, assuring us of God's fatherly affection. And that's how you know you're fellowshiping with the Trinity.

[23 : 19] When you're looking at the cross of Christ and you're filled with gratitude, and at the same moment, you know that the Father, the Father's love is being poured out upon you.

It's a good thing. I said at the beginning that one of the reasons that we love the Trinity, one of the reasons that Christians are just all about the Trinity, is that the Trinity is the key to love.

Maybe a better way to say it is that the Trinity breathes life into love. And it begs a question for you and I. And the question that it begs is, are we, here at St. John's Evening Church, are we a Trinity people?

What do I mean by that? I mean, are we living the Trinity? Are we a people who are characterized primarily by the fact that we are walking in the love of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit?

And I'm not asking, do we just believe in the Trinity or do we pray Trinitarian prayers or do we confess the creed? I'm asking, are we living the Trinity? It's a different question.

[24 : 41] It's critically important that we do believe in the Trinity, but it is also critically important that we live it out. So how do you know if you're living out the Trinity? Let me tell you.

You know you're living the Trinity by looking at the quality of the relationships you have with other Christians. You see, because God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit desire to share their love with us, but when we receive that true, authentic Trinitarian love, you can't just be a repository for it.

You know, we're not buckets. It just kind of fit there. When that love hits the human heart, it must be expressed outward in love towards other people.

So you can tell whether or not you're living the Trinity by looking at the quality of the relationships you have with, particularly with other Christians. And when I look around the congregation, I see some really encouraging things.

I see some of us who are building deep and authentic and sacrificial relationships with each other. Home group, youth group, Bible study, sometimes in completely informal meetings, you're developing true relationships and friendships.

[25 : 55] That's living the Trinity. That's great. There's others of us here who don't know anybody.

And there's others of us here who have kind of become satisfied with a kind of disconnected life where you come, you're religious, you do the thing, you confess all the stuff, but you're not building that deep community with other people.

You're like Christopher McClendous, off in the middle of nowhere, isolated. And that's not Christianity. Happiness is only real when it is shared.

Christianity is only real when it is shared. And some people here who are learning to forgive, people who have really, really, really, really hurt you.

And you're doing that because you've seen the grace of Jesus. And you've seen Jesus' grace toward you. And that is causing you to then extend that grace to people who have really hurt you.

[27 : 01] That is living the Trinity. And there's others of us who are paralyzed in that regard. And you're imprisoned and increasingly isolated by the unforgiveness and bitterness and hatred that is resident within your heart.

And the only thing that will solve it is the love of the Trinity, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and the love of God. I said at the beginning, believing in the Trinity is what makes Christianity different than any other religion.

Living the Trinity is the thing that makes the church different than any other kind of person. And we live in a world that is suffering from terrible isolation.

Most people around us are completely isolated from God and largely isolated from other people. And they are starving, but not for lack of food.

And they are freezing, but not because they're physically cold. They desperately need real and authentic love. But they just don't have a clue where to get it.

[28 : 12] And Jesus gives a great offer to us and a great promise. He says, they will know you are my disciples by your love for each other. And the wonderful, wonderful thing is that as the Trinity shares his love with us, St. John's evening service, as the Trinity shares his love with us and we share that love with one another, the world will look at us and they will see the one thing they desperately need more than anything else.

They will see the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Let's pray. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we know that you have, from all eternity past, been love.

And you are love. And you always forever will be love. Grant us, as a church, that we may taste and see that goodness in you.

Lord God, that you would break down in us all that impedes our reception of your love. That you would break down in us all that impedes our expression of your love.

that the world may know that we belong to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.