

New Life in the Trinity

John 3:1-17

Introduction

The Athanasian Creed, which we will confess today, was written to defend the doctrine of the Trinity. An old heresy called Arianism, which denied the Trinity, was gaining popularity again. The Athanasian Creed emphasizes the importance of this doctrine by saying, at the opening and closing, that one cannot be saved without believing in the doctrine of the Trinity. But wait a minute! Didn't Paul tell the Philippian jailer, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved*" (**Acts 16:31**)? Why, then does the Creed say that one must believe in the doctrine of the Trinity? To believe Jesus died for your sins is to believe in the Trinity. In today's Gospel lesson, we see how our salvation depends on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person of the Godhead has a necessary role.

It's All About Giving

Put as simply as I can, *The Father gave His Son, for the Son to give His life, so the Spirit could give us life*. Now, we could stop here and have the world's shortest sermon. But I think we can explore this a little bit further. As we look at our Gospel lesson, we will start with the Spirit and work our way back to the Father to see just how they are all involved in our salvation.

The Spirit Gives Us Life

Jesus says, "*Unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*" (**John 3:3**). Nicodemus thinks Jesus is talking about a second physical birth. So, Jesus goes on to say, "*Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God*" (**John 3:5**). Theologians have disagreed as to what "water" refers to here. Some say it's physical birth since Jesus goes on to compare the physical with spiritual, "flesh and Spirit". Some say it's a way of referring to the Holy Spirit, as when John the Baptist said about Jesus, "*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire*" (**Luke 3:16**). Water is a way of referring to the power and work of the Spirit as fire does. Others say it refers to Christ, the heavenly, living Water. Most Lutherans believe the water is the water of Baptism, as Jesus says in **Mark**, "*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved*" (**Mark 16:16**). The fact that there is such extensive disagreement on the water, shows that what's more important here is the Spirit. The water of Baptism is nothing without the Word added to it. It is the Spirit adding the Word that makes the water Baptism. It is the Holy Spirit who applies the blood of Jesus and works salvation in us. We are born of the Spirit. He gives us new life.

The Son Gave His Life

As I just said, the Holy Spirit applies the blood of Christ. The hinge pin of our salvation is the cross of Christ. Indeed, *without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins* (**Hebrews 9:22**). That's why Christ is our "Redeemer." He paid the price for our sins on the cross. As we learned in the **Small Catechism**, He paid for them *not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death*. The only price that could satisfy the debt of our sins was the death of God. Since God cannot die, the Son became a man and lived a perfect life on earth so He could die in our

place. That's what the words of Absolution mean, when we say, "Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins."

The Father Gave His Son

Which brings us to the first part of **verse 16** in our text, *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son (John 3:16)*. That's a testimony to the breadth and depth of God's love. Whenever you hear someone ask, "How could an all-powerful, all-loving God allow all the suffering that goes on in the world"? tell them that this is the same God who gave His only Son and allowed us to torture and kill Him because He loved us so much. That's why we're singing "O Love, How Deep" and "What Wondrous Love Is This" during Communion.

God Has Given Us the Means of Grace

Speaking of Communion, we see the Trinity at work here, also. In the Preface, we pray, "We give thanks for Your boundless love, shown to us when You sent Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ ... giving Him into death." Then, in the Prayer of Thanksgiving, we pray, "Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may faithfully eat and drink of the fruit of His cross and receive ... forgiveness, life, and salvation." That's why we must believe in the doctrine of the Trinity to be saved. Our salvation, our **NEW LIFE IS IN THE TRINITY**.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
