

SERMON BY PASTOR PETER MARTYN
REDEEMER LUTHERAN CHURCH - MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN
June 17, 1973

TRINITY SUNDAY - (Father's day)

"FATHER KNOWS BEST"

"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! . . . And (the seraphim) touched my mouth and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven.' And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.'" (Isaiah 6:5,7-8)

'Dear Dad,

Will you please explain this bit about faith to me? You see, I wonder what I should believe, or if I should believe at all. You've always taught me to believe that the Bible is the Word of God -- that it's the most important book in the world. This may be true; but if it is, why in my developing years didn't you read it to me or help me to understand its truths? In all my seventeen years, I can't remember a single time when you sat down and read or explained it to me. This bothers me.

This bit about going to church

-- if it is so important to worship and commune -- if the church is what you tell me it is, then why did you send me to Sunday School while you played golf? Why do you have so much time for your business associates, and so little time to work with the people of the church. You see Dad, what I'm asking is: What am I supposed to believe about the importance of God?

But don't get me wrong, Dad. I mean, you've always been really great to me. You've given me a beautiful home, the best in clothing, the latest in color T.V., a brand new car -- yes, I'm sure these things have cost you a pretty penny! But if God and his church are so important, then why do you complain about the church costing too much? Aren't we supposed to believe that the Church is God in the world today? Isn't the church--God's people--who are to bring his love to others, so that he can bring us the peace and brotherhood that the Bible talks about?

You see, Dad, I'm beginning to wonder about this religion bit. Won't you please help me to understand?

Your bewildered son, ..'

That letter from a 17 year old boy packs quite a wallop. And yet we have to admire the honest courage of that son. For that son's letter represents the power of God. God became TRULY PRESENT as that letter was shared. An earthly father CAME FACE TO FACE with his heavenly Father.

A similar confrontation with God is recorded for us in today's Old Testament lesson. Some 2700 years ago a man named Isaiah came FACE TO FACE with his heavenly Father. He experienced the confrontation of God during a cultic worship service.

But the experience for both Isaiah and the father mentioned earlier was the same - THEY WERE BEING CALLED INTO A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND GOD'S PEOPLE. They were being called to take their fellowmen SERIOUSLY! They were being called to realize that their heavenly FATHER KNOWS BEST what they should do with their lives.

For you who are sons and daughters here today, I hope you see how this applies to your lives. You too can be the power of God -- you can bring NOT ONLY YOUR FATHERS but all of us face to face with God when you see us taking our religious faith for granted. Even these contemporary worship services help us come face to face with God -- because they make us think MORE CAREFULLY of what we are saying in worship.

In a way, they help us come into a new relationship with God, each other, and WITH EACH OF YOU. And we hope they do the same for you. For if they are TO BE OF ANY VALUE FOR ALL OF US, then they must also help you come into a new relationship with God AND WITH EACH OF US.

But why do we -- and why did Isaiah -- and why did the father HAVE TO CONTINUALLY BE CONFRONTED BY GOD through each other? We need this confrontation because we have to recognize that we have often deceived ourselves, our God, and one another. And then, like Isaiah, we must face God and each other and say:

"Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips."

In other words, we cannot come into a NEW RELATIONSHIP with God or each other UNTIL WE HONESTLY face up to our own shortcomings. That is, we have to have the courage to look at God and each other and say: "I'm not perfect, please forgive me."

You may say, well that's really not so difficult -- I admit that I'm not perfect. But do you really? Do I? Do we really believe that?

I wonder, for instance, how the father responded to his son. Did he say to his son: "My son, I'm sorry -- I guess I sometimes haven't practiced what I preached. Forgive me, son." Or did he get defensive and call his son a little smart so and so!

Isaiah's example teaches us that when we are confronted by our limitations - our uncleanness, we need not GET ALL UP-TIGHT. We need only confess our shortcomings honestly, AND WE WILL BE FREED FROM THE GUILT caused by them.

My friends, that's the powerful freedom that God gives us when we face him and each other honestly. Individually and as a whole society, we need this example desperately today.

For our world is teaching us to be DEFENSIVE and DISHONEST. The world teaches us that when confronted by our failures or cover-ups, we should deny them or lay the blame on someone else. The world teaches us that if we can get away with hiding the truth, then do so in the name of success!

But God calls us into honest confession - whether the issue is Watergate or who stole the cookie from the cookie-jar. He says that the only way we can be truly liberated from the guilt of the past IS TO HONESTLY CONFESS OUR UNCLEANNES TO HIM, AND TO EACH OTHER.

And he promises that as we do so, "OUR GUILT WILL BE TAKEN AWAY, AND OUR SINS FORGIVEN." He promises us that HE KNOWS BEST. How much is that promise worth in a world that is ridden by deception and guilt?

My Christian friends, we must take the time to be honest with God and each other. Our future as individuals and as a nation depends on it. I'll never forget the time that my dad took the time to REALLY BE HONEST WITH GOD AND ME.

I'll never forget this experience because my dad was not known for many conversations with his son. My mom tended to be the decision-maker and communicator in our family.

It was ten years ago - almost exactly. In a hospital bed my dad lay suffering with cancer. As he grimaced from extensive adominal surgery, he beckoned me to his bedside - and said:

"Pete, I'm not very good with words - especially words about our Christian faith. But since I don't know if I'll make it -- I do want you to know something I've felt for a long time. I want you to follow through with your dream -- your dream for the ministry.

How I wanted to say to my dad at that moment: Woe is me, dad! I am a man of unclean lips -- I am unfit - unworthy! And I did say that to myself. But God had confronted me through my father -- he was calling me into a new relationship with Him, with my dad, and with all whom I'd touch. And I thank God that he still uses people like my father. Just REGULAR people. People without bi names, without any wealth, without any degrees. Yes, I thank God that he uses regular people to call all of us back to him and to each other.

Isn't it sad that we so often have to reach the CRISIS before open up to each other. Isn't it sad that a person has to be suffering and maybe even dying before he can openly confess his feelings to his loved ones. Isn't it sad that we have to reach the crisis of death before we confess and ask for forgiveness of each other.

Isn't it sad that our children often have to freak out on drugs BEFORE WE TAKE THE TIME to listen to their lostness, their confusion, their need for confession. Isn't it equally sad that parents often have to hit the pit of frustration and fear before their kids will finally open up and share with them. Isn't it sad that we SO FEAR open confession to each other -- isn't it sad that we don't often have the confidence of forgiveness.

Well, God calls us back into relationship with him SO THAT WE WILL HAVE THAT CONFIDENCE. His call did not end with Isaiah. Today, he often uses family members to confront us BACK INTO RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM AND EACH OTHER. That confrontation causes us to confess our deceptions OPENLY AND HONESTLY. And we do this, NOT with fear, but with the desire and confidence of FORGIVENESS!

And after we hear our heavenly father, and earthly father, or mother, or son, or sister, or whomever say: "your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven" - then we again hear the voice of the Lord saying: "Whom shall I send; who will go?"

And that same Lord hopes to hear from each of us: "Here am I! Send me."

"Here am I, Lord! Send me to my son or daughter so that I can tell them how I really feel -- so that I can tell them my fears and frustrations and that I'm worried about them."

"Here am I, Lord. Send me to my mom and dad so that I can confess my doubts and fears and failures AND BE ASSURED OF THEIR FORGIVENESS."

"Here am I, Lord. Send me to the board meeting so that I can honestly confess how I hate the present policies. Send me, Lord, to my fellow employee with my honest confession of my resentment of her. Send me, Lord, to the assembly line with just a word of thanks to those guys who suffer this heat and routine day-in and day-out."

"Here am I. Send me, Lord, so that all people will know the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. Yes, send us, Lord, so that ALL WHOM WE TOUCH will be baptized disciples in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen

TRINITY SUNDAY

Luth. Church of the Master - Troy

May 25, 1975

"WHO ARE THE BIG THREE?"

"And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." Matt. 28:18-20

"Who are the Big Three?" This is a question being asked often around Detroit these days. Implied, of course, is the question: Which three industries have the greatest power? And the answer most often is determined by the day's stock market results. Industrial power is directly correlated to the investor's return.

Among the "stock" entries of the Wall Street Journal, you can be assured that Church of the Master will not be among the top three. Nor even The Lutheran Church in America, even though our headquarters is in New York. In fact, you'll probably not find the Christian Church anywhere on those stock returns - surely not among the top three.

identifies

The stock market ~~XXXXXXXX~~ the Big Three in business, but the Gospel reveals the Big Three for daily life.

G.M., Ford, and Chrysler may have once paid the top three dividends, but the Gospel today reveals that those dividends are worthless without the power of the Big Three. . . namely, Father, Son & Holy Spirit.

The great commission of industry is always a good stock return - but the Great Commission of the Gospel is not measured in dollar & cents power -- it's a Commission of healing and restoring power -- a power that heals the divisions and restores unity to human life that is DIVIDED and BRUTALIZED by life's competitive forces all grubbing for the biggest piece of action.

Today's Gospel is the Great Commission of faith. It is God's statement thru Jesus Christ - telling all who follow in faith WHAT THE SCORE IS from the Creator's point of view. It is the summary statement of the mission of the church.

And it begins with a direct and uncompromising thesis from Jesus: All authority (meaning "power") in heaven and earth has been given to me.

Christ is our absolute way for living -- he is our absolute model for life -- there is no fluctuation with the market -- there is no need for a model change or restyling -- there is no alteration of his way of love during good or bad economic times -- EVERY CHRISTIAN is first and foremost under the authority of Christ.

That means for the Christian, that Christ's way RULES that persons conduct, actions, and transactions. Every deal - every program -- every relationship must be scrutinized by God's redeeming power FIRST.

What today's Gospel from Christ is saying is quite simply - the stock market value is secondary to the redeeming value of God. And we all know that this Great Commission is hard to live up to.

And if we're really honest - you and I know we often put MORE value on the redemption of dollars than we do on the redemption of love. Which simply interpreted means that every one of us has coped out on Christ's authority - we have sold out to selfish value.

Thank God, that his absolute power not ONLY directs me in how to live, but also FORGIVES me when I fail to do so. Yes, that's why Christ can claim his power is greater than all others - because there is no greater power than the forgiving love of God.

And it's that love which leads me to FULFILL the second level of Christ's Commission - TO GO AND MAKE FOLLOWERS OF ALL PEOPLE -first, baptizing and then teaching.

It's at this second level THAT the rubber hits the road. Many Christians intellectually affirm their belief in God -- but Christian faith is more than intellectualism. Christian faith asserts that God's power is an ENERGY which moves us beyond intellectualism TO ACTION. We call that power the Holy Spirit.

To believe in ^{that} power INTELLECTUALLY is to ACTIVATE that power in every relationship of life.

~~Since this is a very common~~ ~~Accordingly.~~ Let's illustrate. A car is of NO VALUE if when gassed up it's simply left idling in neutral all day. The vehicle only has real value when in gear - then it serves its intended purpose.

Similarly - faith is meaningless if simply affirmed as an abstract concept - such faith is simply idling in neutral. Stated personally, the individual or church which only serves itself IS SIMPLY IDLING IN NEUTRAL.

Only when faith is IN GEAR - moving - serving the needs of humanity can the church or an individual claim to be offering THE POWER OF GOD. So it is that the individual and the church CANNOT support only current expenses and claim to be fulfilling Christ's commission.

Part of our mission is always Benevolence, Hunger, the seminary -- and other human needs which cause us to reach beyond ourselves. A church that is ALIVE for others WILL ALWAYS be alive for itself. But once that body of ~~people~~ is only alive for itself - IT IS NO LONGER Christ's church/but just another humanitarian club of society.

~~is~~ The Church trusts in Christ's authority-- and his rule is: Go to all people - There's no compromise in that directive.

Finally - his Commission states - As you trust my power and go to baptize and teach - you can be assured I will be with you always.

Christ's Great Commission concludes with a promise of a relationship "I am with you always."

The great ^{industrial} powers of society hold out many promises and promotions -- and these are good as long as the stock stays up. Obviously, these are good incentives -- we can be grateful for such promises and promotions. But even when the stock remains among the top three - there is always a final day for each of us. And at that time, all the dividends in the world cannot purchase the promise of another day.

At that moment - there is only one power that PROMISES and DELIVERS -- only one power that does not desert us at the last hour - the power of God, known to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Thank God that he has led us here again this morning TO AFFIRM and AGAIN CONFESS our trust in his authority over all life -- a power which will control and influence our lives, to the close of the age.

Amen

TRINITY (1st After Pentecost)
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 1, 1980

"TO TELL THE TRUTH"

"When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will speak on his own authority." JOHN 16:13

Several years ago, Gary Moore moderated a popular show called "To Tell The Truth." Possibly, many of you here today were regular fans of that show as I was. There was something intriguing about trying to identify the real mystery guest.

As you might recall - three mystery guests were seated before the panel. The panelists had been given a general background on the identity of the real person. It was their job through questioning to uncover the identity of the mystery guest.

Today - we celebrate Trinity Sunday. Today we celebrate the fact that God has manifested himself to us in three unique persons -- and yet the mysterious element is that they are all the same God. We say THAT GOD IS ONE -- YET THREE.

It should be very obvious from that statement that there is still much mystery about these three persons of God. And that's where we must begin today -- we must begin by confessing THAT WE DO NOT YET KNOW EVERYTHING THAT THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT GOD. IF the spirit of truth is guiding the Christian Church -- then the church must begin by admitting its limitations.

God's people - the church - have been given the truth about God -- but they must always remember that God IS NOT YET FINISHED REVEALING HIMSELF. God is still making himself known in history -- and Christians must be courageous enough to admit they are still in the process OF GETTING TO KNOW GOD.

But once we have admitted that -- once we have admitted our own limitations -- then we are free TO CONFESS WITH CONVICTION THE TRUTHS THAT GOD HAS MADE KNOWN TO US. In fact, then we are commanded by God TO TELL THE TRUTH -- the whole truth that has thus far been revealed to us.

And that truth is that we have come TO KNOW and TO TRUST God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is through these three self-revelations that we have seen God fulfilling his purpose of love in the world.

In our first lesson today - the wisdom writer of Proverbs speaks of God as the one who was here from the very beginning -- he speaks of God creating the depths and bringing forth springs abounding with water. He speaks of God shaping the mountains and hills -- of God establishing the universal galaxies -- of God assigning waters to some places and firm foundations to others.

Every one of us knows this God -- we call Him Father. He is the one who has loved us by blessing us with all the abundance of creation. All the goodness of life is a reflection of this Father's love.

And yet -- what has the response of man over the centuries been to the blessings of the Father? Did the love of the Father inspire humanity to the same heights of love? Did the love of the Father cause mankind to live in harmony with creation -- and with all other peoples?

Quite to the contrary - instead of living in the image of God -- humanity tried to replace God with her own set of rules. In fact, man's response to the Father's love was to rebel against that Father and to take all the credit for everything the Father had done.

It was for this reason that God could not limit his self-revelation AS FATHER ALONE -- it was necessary for God to become a man. And so God the Father - the same Father, emptied himself into a human form - and became God the Son. For creation alone had not convinced humanity that God was a loving God. And so God came to live among his creatures in order that they might KNOW THE TRUTH OF HIS LOVE.

And God as the Son lived -- and because of his love, he died an innocent victim of humanity's hatred. But he returned to those who had rejected him -- he returned to **show them** that he loved them even in spite of their rejection. He returned to show that his love cannot be destroyed by the powers of hatred, evil, or even death.

And that's why we call God the Son THE CHRIST. Because he has shown us that we are hopeless without his forgiving love. He has shown us that left to our own devices, we will destroy that which the Father has given us for our own good. Yes - this Son of God has shown us that only God can put us at peace with himself -- through the sacrificial life he gave as Jesus the Christ.

Yes - God the Son came to earth to convince us that he and the Father could not be separated. They are of the same substance -- Father and Son, Son and Father -- always have been one, always will be one.

And before ~~this~~ God the Son left this earth -- he promised all his followers that he would **send** himself to all believers in the form of a guiding power. He called the guiding power THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH -- in other places he called that guiding power the Counselor or the Advocate.

You and I also know this third person of God because it is God the Spirit who has guided us here this morning. Whatever or whomever has

called you out of your bed this morning IS
THE SPIRIT OF GOD'S TRUTH.

God the Holy Spirit is that power in the world which calls us together -- which gathers us to hear God's Word -- which enlightens us to understand God's love -- which makes us feel **at** peace after we have heard the Word. Whenever we gather around this altar and receive God's forgiving love -- it is God's power that has guided us to receive this truth. God the Holy Spirit guides us to experience love and joy -- peace and patience -- kindness and gentleness. Whenever we experience or share these powers -- then we know we are being guided by God's spirit of truth.

This morning you have responded to the Spirit of truth -- you have allowed God the Holy Spirit to gather you into the arena where the Spirit's power works -- namely, among the community of faith. You have been God's faithful remnant today - and God is truly grateful for your faithfulness. Through His word and sacraments -- you are promised his justifying peace.

But for each Christian who has responded to the Spirit's call this morning -- 2 or 3 have rejected God's Spirit of truth. For one reason or another -- they have not felt it worthwhile to give God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit praise and thanks for His unifying love. They have taken God's love for granted.

And so God the Holy Spirit calls upon you and me to help make his truth known to all people -- especially those who have absented themselves from his family of faith.

And further - that Spirit of truth calls upon all of us to continue to grow in our understanding of God. He calls upon us to use scientists, historians, and scholars of all kinds to help us have a more comprehensive view of himself. And through all these people he hopes that we will better grasp the truth of his creation and

the multitude of his blessings. And ultimately,
all these disclosures will again lead us back
to the eternal truth THAT GOD IS A LOVING GOD --
AS FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT.

AMEN.

TRINITY SUNDAY (Pentecost I)
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 14, 1981

"GO WORLDWIDE WITH THE BIG THREE ... IN ONE"

"Go, then, to all people everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Matt. 28:19

"Go to all people everywhere." This describes the fundamental faith of every Christian. It was on a mountain in Galilee that Christ stretched the horizon of his disciples. No longer would their mission be isolated to Israel alone. Beyond their sight was a vast world, most of it unknown to them. It was to that vast world that Christ's final command was directing them. The narrow limits of their lives were being broken open. Christ-- the highest authority-- commanded: "Go and make disciples of all nations."

This is the vibrant theme of the Pentecost season -- this is the season that God seeks to break open our temptation to exclusiveness and isolationism. Instead he commands us "to permeate the world with the Spirit of Christ. The word is "Go" - yes GO and keep on going until all people come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Christ's commission has a universal application. For many of us, that command is a little too forthright and uncompromising, isn't it?!? Our world with its technological structures and computerized systems is not very receptive to the idea that a man from Galilee has anything important to say. This world says -- get lost Jesus! We can build our own paradise! We have our own data-bank of resources and talents and skills. Jesus Christ -- keep your commission out of our worldly affairs.

That's the word of the world, isn't it?
The world wants us to stifle our Christ
and often in obedience to the world WE DO RETREAT.
We retreat by limiting the horizons of
Christ's power to each other ... or to an
hour or two of fellowship on Sunday mornings.
We take Christ's commission seriously only if
it suits our convenience and won't upset
anybody.

It only stands to reason that cults and
gurus of all kinds have become the replacement
for Christ for a large segment of our society.

But Christ will not be defeated by this
momentary weakness among his people. He charges
us over and over again TO GO ... to go into
the world beyond our sanctuaries EQUIPPED
with the Good News of his love. Whether
we are called to his beautiful world of promise
here at Hope -- or to his tarnished world of
evil and corruption -- or to his fragmented
world of broken promises where people and
nations work against each other -- in all parts
of his world HE CALLS US TO BE HIS POWER OF
HEALING AND RESTORATION.

And how does he equip us to encounter this
worldwide mission?? Not with a portfolio of
blue chip stocks! Not with multi-national
corporate clout! Not with increased military
might! He merely equips us with a personal
experience of himself. Nothing more. Nothing
less. He offers us three self-expressions
to experience him -- all the same self, but each
one experienced and understood in a slightly
different way.

We have labeled these self-expressions as
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are merely
three labels for the same being-- the same God.
Each one of them is fully God. All three are
one - yet God has decided to declare his presence
in three different ways. In order to cognitively

capture those three expressions -- we have explained them as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But I ask you in all honesty -- is explaining God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit TOTALLY ADEQUATE?? Not really! It is sufficient, but not adequate. The Bible itself has many more labels for God -- including Lord, Savior, King, Judge, Lover, Shepherd, Almighty, Prince of Peace, Master,

Have you ever tried to rationally explain the reality of God -- especially to someone else?? Recently one of our confirmands put me to the real test. He began by asking: Is Jesus fully God? Obviously I answered, "Yes."

Well he continued, "If Jesus is fully God, then why did he suffer and die?" As you might guess, I answered, "Because he was also fully man." And then the student was quick to respond: "Well then, if he was fully man, he couldn't have been fully God."

You'll have to admit -- that young man was being fully rational. And my response, like any faithful response, was not fully rational: "Yes, Jesus was both fully God and fully man."

At that point - the young man terminated his interrogation -- probably out of sheer confusion. Because the Trinity has never been a fully rational reality. It always has been more correctly an experiential reality -- which has never fully translated into perfect, rational expression.

The experience of God goes like this:

We have experienced the power of God as creator: we call that experience - THE FATHER.

We have experienced the power of God as a human expression of earthly love -- we call that experience - THE SON.

We have experienced the power of God as a present power of support and comfort and forgiveness and merciful love -- we call that experience - THE HOLY SPIRIT.

In short - we have experienced the reality of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- because all of us have experienced his creation ... his incarnated love ... and his support and comfort. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: all three are one; the same One is all three. Yet each has been experienced in a unique way.

Christ commissions us TO BAPTIZE and TEACH everyone the experience of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Through Baptism -- we are reminded of the experience that

God has created us ...
that God has loved, forgiven, and made us eternally his ...
that God continues to improve us through receiving the power of his word and presence.

*as Father
as Son
as Holy Spirit*

Christ tells us to GO WORLDWIDE with these three BIG EXPRESSIONS of the same God. We are to go and to teach the world TO BELIEVE that God is THE CREATOR -- THE REDEEMER -- and THE ONE WHO KEEPS THE WORLD AT PEACE - THE COMFORTER.

has

There is one document that ^{has} come into being to safeguard this truth of one God in three expressions: namely, the Athanasian Creed. Let us dedicate our minds and hearts to Christ's commission to teach the world that God is fully the same as Father - Son - and Holy Spirit. Let us share this great statement of faith as should be our tradition every Trinity Sunday:

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

AMEN

HOLY TRINITY (Pentecost I)
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
May 28, 1983
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"NOT ALL VICTORIES WITHOUT SOME DEFEATS"

... we ^{B=AST}rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, know that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us."
Romans 5:3-5

Suzette and Harold Kushner are two parents that many of you here today have already come to know. Harold is best known for his recent best-seller: "When Bad Things Happen To Good People."

As many of you have already read, Harold and Suzette Kushner had been blessed with a little boy, Aaron. He was a bright and happy child, who before the age of two could identify a dozen different varieties of dinosaurs. But about the time that Aaron was eight months old, Harold and Suzette Kushner became concerned: their little boy stopped gaining weight... and his hair started falling out at about a year old.

Prominent doctors began to see Aaron. But all they told Harold and Suzette was that Aaron would not grow very tall; and they attached other complicated names to his condition. Finally, with Suzette very pregnant again -- the Kushners moved from New York to a Boston suburb -- where Harold became the rabbi of a local congregation. There they discovered a local pediatrician who was doing research in problems of children's growth -- and Aaron was introduced to this doctor.

Two months later -- the same day that their new little daughter was born -- the doctor visited Suzette in the hospital. He told both Harold and Suzette that day that Aaron was suffering from a condition called "progeria" -- "rapid aging." He went on to say that Aaron would never grow much taller than 3-feet -- that he would have no hair on his body or head -- that he would look like a little old man while he was still a child -- and that he would die in his early teens. And much as this doctor predicted -- Aaron died two days after his 14th birthday.

The obvious question for Harold and Suzette Kushner was: WHY DID THIS HAPPEN TO US?? Harold was just starting a new rabbinic ministry -- why should a man dedicated to God encounter this kind of grief?? Why should he lose his treasured son at 14?? Why should a committed servant of God be treated with such unfairness in life???

Much like many of us here today -- the Kushners had grown up basically believing that "bad things only happened to bad people." They had also come to some very incorrect theological conclusions. Both Suzette and Harold had the notion that God caused suffering to wicked or evil people. Faced with the suffering and death of their son -- they just couldn't put their early religious understanding together with their present circumstances.

As Harold Kushner aptly points out in the book -- the onslaught of Aaron's disease was the beginning of his book: "When Bad Things Happen to Good People." And even though he didn't write his book until 15 years after his son's prognosis -- he came to the stark realization in those 15-years that SUFFERING AND PAIN happen to faithful and righteous people as well as to wicked and evil people.

Moreover - he came to the conclusion that God does not cause our suffering and pain -- but he does not prevent us from experiencing suffering and pain either. God the Father has created this world for our good and pleasure -- but he has not given us a world without grief and pain. And this is a lesson that the most devout people have the most difficult time learning -- we want to believe that AS FAITHFUL BELIEVERS -- we will always be spared suffering and pain, disease and tragedy.

But the facts of life ... and the facts of scripture just do not confirm that kind of fantasy. St. Paul makes it crystal clear from his letter to the Romans that suffering will be a reality for all believers. In fact, sometimes the faithful (esp in his day) suffered persecution and pain even more than others because of their faith.

Whether addressed by Rabbi Kushner or St. Paul -- we all know they are telling the truth -- suffering and pain is a reality we all confront. And when we confront it -- we all ask: WHY HAS THIS HAPPENED TO ME??

There
is hardly a week that goes by that I am not confronted with the reality of someone's UNFAIR SUFFERING AND PAIN.

This past week alone was filled with several different illustrations of this reality. A young woman coming to me with the news that she and her husband had just been told that they could probably never have children. She was truly grief-stricken -- BECAUSE SHE KNEW, AND I KNEW, that they would make excellent parents. As she said -- I hear all this news about friends of mine who have had one, or two, or three abortions -- and it makes me deeply angry! What I would give just to have one baby! And why should we be denied?? We want so much to provide a loving home for a child.

She told me she was very angry with God. And I told her I could really understand her anger -- and that it was "o.k." to feel this anger and let it out! But I also had to tell her that God was not causing her present suffering; he was not punishing her or seeking to deny her a child. Unfortunately -- creation is not perfect ... and sometimes our bodies just do not function as we would want them to.

Likewise -- this week I learned of the auto accident of one of my cousins in Wisconsin. She and her fiance had asked me to officiate for their wedding in early July. Never did they expect a near-drunk driver to be passing another car on the shoulder of a two-lane highway in Wisconsin -- and then lose control and come across the median directly in front of their car. Obviously -- God did not cause this accident to happen; and he doesn't have any spiritual purpose for it either. It was caused by the stupid foolishness of a drinking driver.

Or you can look on the back of the yellow bulletin insert. There you see the number of persons who have served this country in the military.. There you also see the number of deaths that we remember this Memorial Day Weekend. Obviously - we are grateful for their service in defending their country; but we are not grateful for their deaths. God did not cause NOR DID HE WILL THEIR DEATHS -- it was the foolishness and arrogance of war that caused these persons to die.

Whether those military persons were believers or not -- they all experienced suffering ... and many experienced death. Some died; some came home; and some will be maimed for life. War is a grim reminder that suffering and pain are realities of life. Even though our nation has had many victories -- they have not been without considerable defeats-- esp. in the loss of life and inflicted suffering.

As was well stated by one of our members this past week as I was calling after an extensive hospitalization: He said that he had often been told by well meaning doctors, and nurses and friends: "Don't worry about anything -- everything will be all right." He said people who say such things -- whether medical professionals or well-meaning friends -- such people are living with their heads burried in the sand.

And ofcourse - this member is absolutely correct. As a great anonymous poem goes: "God has never promised skys always blue -- flower strewn pathways all our lives through -- not has he promised sun without rain, or joy without sorrow. But he has promised strength for the day rest for the laborer ... and light along the way ... grace for our trials... help from above... unfailing sympathy and undying love."

In short -- God has never promised us ALL VICTORIES OF LIFE WITHOUT SOME DEFEATS! One of the greatest lessons to be learned in playing sports is THAT NO MATTER HOW GOOD YOU ARE... NO MATTER HOW WELL YOU HIT THE BALL OR SHOOT THE BASKETS ... THERE WILL STILL BE DEFEATS! And the real winners of life are the ones who ACCEPT the defeats as well as the victories BY CONTINUING TO CARE...AND LOVE ... AND NOT GIVING UP!

That's what Paul is saying when he says "we rejoice in our sufferings." Obviously - Paul is not urging that we become sadists or masochists -- that we actually go out and seek to suffer. But he is saying that we have all been graced -- in Holy Baptism -- we have been assured of God's peace and love and eternal security. God is not seeking to be vindictive ... to punish us or condemn us. He is seeking to love us and help us and weep with us and uplift us in our times of suffering and pain. He is seeking to build up our character -- to help us to use our suffering and defeats to gain strength from him and one another.

There is no doubt about it -- it is hard to rejoice when faced with suffering and pain and defeat! Whether it's the loss of a little boy to progeria or the death of a loved one in war or any other tragedy of life -- GOD HURTS JUST LIKE WE HURT OVER THOSE TRAGEDIES.

But God also offers us the assurance of his love and compassion and forgiveness when we encounter life's suffering and defeats. That is the source of our rejoicing -- NOT THAT WE LOVE PAIN AND SUFFERING -- but that we are loved by God and his people even in the midst of our suffering and defeats.

... and pleading for

Yes - bad things do happen to Good People -- there aren't all victories without some defeats for God's people -- but through them all, God does not disappoint us, BECAUSE HE CONTINUES TO POUR OUT HIS LOVE AND MERCY even amidst the defeats and suffering of life.

AMEN

That's the GOOD NEWS that God the Father intended from the beginning of creation!! That's the GOOD NEWS that Jesus Christ, the Son came to share -- he loved, he forgave, he offered mercy even in the midst of his own suffering and the pain of others. That's the GOOD NEWS that is ours through the Holy Spirit -- through the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion ... through the Scripture and People of God ... through the power of God on earth. Through Father, Son, and Holy Spirit we have the GOOD NEWS that produces endurance ... that builds character ... and that produces hope!!

TRINITY SUNDAY

Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo

June 2, 1985 (Educ. Recognition Sunday)

Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"WHAT AN INHERITANCE!"

"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs -- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ ... "

Romans 8:15-16

After years of intense research and study, Albert Einstein emerged from behind his pile of books one momentous day and announced to a largely disinterested world the whole key to the physical universe. He proclaimed the secret that keeps the world turning and prevents you and me from spinning off into oblivion. He summed it up into a simple formula: E equals MC squared.

Scientists all over the world immediately got to work studying Einstein's extraordinary theory. But the majority of ordinary folks (like you and me) did not have the slightest idea what it was all about. The formula, E equals MC squared, was just beyond their grasp. Few of us even know what the letters stand for, let alone what they mean. Most of us are willing to accept the scientists findings and let it go at that. Whether E equals MC squared or not, it certainly won't change the price of bread. Better to leave the matter with the experts.

We may have the same reaction to this day - Trinity Sunday. The doctrine of the Trinity remains one of the deepest mysteries of faith. To the perpetual confusion of everyone, our teaching sums up this mystery in a kind of sacred mathematics ... a theological equation: God is three, yet God is one; three equals one, and one equals three.

Like the scientists working on Einstein's theory, the theologians are still working on the Trinity formula. Meanwhile, the rest of us might be tempted to say it all really hasn't changed the price of spiritual bread.

Obviously, the doctrine of the Trinity has been a key to our understanding of God. We dare not make too light of it. It is the teaching that makes mainline Christians unique --it distinguishes us from Unitarians, Jehovahs Witnesses, Mormons, and other modern day cults. But does not our inheritance go beyond this

doctrine, this ancient teaching, this theological formula??

Suppose a Blade reporter came up to you after worship this morning and asked: "Please explain for me your Christian belief in the Trinity. I need one, concise sentence for my article." What would you say? Many of us would say, "Well, yes, the Trinity is certainly part of our faith, our teaching ... and I truly believe it. Now let's see - you want me to explain it. Huh?!? I'm afraid you're going to have to ask the pastor that question. That's his job; he's trained to explain -- I'm only trained to believe.

Hopefully, we wouldn't pass it off that way. Hopefully, we would say: "Yes, I believe in the Trinity not because I can rationally explain it but because I have experienced it. I have experienced the creative love of God as Father. I have experienced the forgiving mercy of Christ as Son. I have experienced the fellowship and support of God as Spirit. That's our true inheritance. Not merely a doctrine, a teaching, a formula -- but rather THREE EXPERIENCES OF GOD, known as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- all offering the same expression of support!

As with everything in the Christian faith, doctrine always follows experience. God never comes in formulas or theological systems. The ancient Psalmists experienced God -- then they sang of their experience in songs called Psalms. The prophets experienced God -- then they called Israel back to God through their proclamations. The evangelists experienced God -- then they told of God in the flesh as Jesus Christ. God didn't come as a doctrine -- he came permeating all of life -- he was present in all relationships of creation.

Only after he had permeated everything did man devise the formulas and doctrines which tried to define that permeation. Only after recognizing God in all of creation, in all of Jesus, in all of the graces of sacramental life DO WE THEN DEVISE A TRINITY DOCTRINE. Doctrines are human attempts to give definition to God. And they always fall short -- because they tend to put limits upon God.

Doctrines are like the story of the Sunday School boy who heard his pastor say: "God is so much bigger than we can ever imagine ... and he wants to use us in lots of different ways to do his work. God is everywhere," said the pastor. The little boy questioned: "Everywhere?!?" "Yes, everywhere" said the pastor.

The little boy went home and told his mother, "Did you know that God is everywhere? The pastor said so." "Yes, I know that," his mother answered. "You mean he is in the cupboard?" "Yes," said his mom. "Even in the refrigerator -- even when we close the door and the light goes out?" "Yes," said his mother. "Even in the sugar bowl?" as he lifted off the cover. "Yes," his mom reassured, "even in the sugar bowl." The boy quickly slammed down the lid and yelled: "Aha, now I've finally got him!"

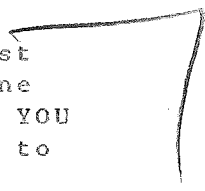
That's often the reality of our doctrines. They are far too enclosing, far too suffocating, far too limiting of God. Doctrines are external formulæ -- external thought systems. Our inheritance of God is so much more than mere definitions or equations. We have been gifted with God's presence, his value system, his power, his breath and life. God is more than a mere external dressing in life.

We must truly get this message across to our young people these days -- for they are so enamoured by mere external things. A psychiatrist was recently being interviewed concerning the current "punk rage" that is sweeping American high schools. Most of you are familiar with the bizarre, rather outrageous styles that characterize punk dress. The psychiatrist noted that punk is different from the hippies of the 60's. The hippies were social in their consciousness. They had values -- they advocated for peace, love, justice, harmony. Their values may have clashed with the establishment, but at least they had values. Punks, on the other hand, are anti-social. They have no values except to "tear down." Their rock festivals are characterized by destructive mania. And their dress says it all -- everything is mere externalism. No internal values or beliefs.

But the psychiatrist noted that punksters are not totally different from even mainline suburbanites -- for they are both caught up in external values. Life for both is merely wearing the right labels, driving the right cars, belonging to the right groups. The doctrine of so many today is merely - "It's what's on the outside that counts!" Our inheritance from God is so much more!

God has created us with the potential to be just like him. Among his whole creation, there is only one creature that has the potential TO BE LIKE GOD, ONLY YOU AND ME. We are the only ones who have the potential to be totally constructive in our lives: to love, to forgive, to share, to uplift, to fortify others. Only man was created to be like God. Is it any wonder that

*on Sunday
We must recognize
the not only a
doctrine - the
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God's goodness!*



God the

we call God "our Father." We cry "Abba, Father," which means "Daddy," because we have experienced God as a creator who has given us his potential -- his potential to build, rather than tear down. Could God be any more loving, any more caring, any more benevolent -- he gives us his own potential. What greater gift could we have from creation!! That's why we call him Father. What greater inheritance could we be given! Abba! Daddy! Wow, what an inheritance!

But we have also experienced God as the one who has rescued us from our own deprivation and sin. God did not merely give us ten commandments about being good, moral people. God did not merely show himself in the beauties of nature and the universe. God did not merely reveal his will through some ancient writings called the Bible. Our God came to live with us and among us AS ONE OF US!

Is there any better way for us to experience God than to have him share our human condition -- our struggles, our hurts, our temptations. This God gave us this created world, he watched us muck it up, and then he still entered that same world to save the ones who have made a total mess of it. That's why we loudly proclaim: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

That's our belief, that's our faith! More than a formula or doctrine. It is an experience of God known as Jesus Christ. He is not just some kind of second person of a Trinity -- he is the God who loves and forgives us totally. Now that's some inheritance!

Jesus

Our inheritance is exactly the same as Christ's. Wow!

But God doesn't leave our experience there. God wants us to experience more than the intimate love of Father and forgiving mercy of Son. He wants us to be assured that his power is within us NOW! He wants us always in a relationship with him. So God comes to us NOW in his Word, in his fellowship, in his sacraments, in his embraces, in hundreds of human gestures of affirmation. He comes as Holy Spirit -- the power & presence that energizes us to be like the Father & Son.

He wants us to show His inheritance now. The power & presence that energizes us to be like the Father & Son.

And each of us knows when we have that Spirit. We've all said, I'm in good spirits today. We feel alive, we feel energized, we feel excitement, we feel forgiven, we feel whole. When that "Spirit" is not within us - we feel apathetic, drained, depressed, downtrodden.

help explain this discussion.

The story I told earlier has one more dimension. The little boy went back to his pastor, and said: "You're right, pastor, my mom said God is everywhere."

That's right, isn't it?" And the pastor said, "Yes." The boy continued: "Well, then, God is big, right?" And the pastor again said: "Yes." "Bigger than my dad's garage, right?" Again, the pastor said "Yes." "Bigger than the Rocky Mountains?" And again the pastor said, "Yes." The boy continued: "And God is inside me, right?" Again the pastor said, "Yes." "Well," the boy said, "Then why doesn't he stick out more!!"

That boy summarized our experience of the Holy Spirit. When God is present within us, he always "sticks out." That's our inheritance. What we have received from God the Father and God the Son ALWAYS STICKS OUT AS GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT. God the Holy Spirit is what is visible of God in your life and mine. God the Holy Spirit is you and me manifesting the gifts of our inheritance -- the gifts of peace, love, joy, gentleness, self-control, patience, forgiveness.

It's hard to put the Trinity into a neat and tidy doctrine or formula. But we have all inherited the Trinity. In creation, we have received the potential to be like God the Father, In redemption, we have experienced the forgiving love of God thru Jesus Christ. In sanctification, God's love is STICKING OUT of our lives as God the Holy Spirit. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three in one; one in three. An irrational doctrine, but an inherited experience that forms the basis of our past, present, and future.

AMEN.

HOLY TRINITY (PENTECOST I)
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
June 11 & 14, 1987
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

" 3-IN-1 "

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

2 Corinthians 13:14

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of
the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all that I have
commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of
the age." Matthew 28:19-20

There's a ridiculous story that reflects a small but
pervasive truth about life and religion. It's about a pilot
and three passengers -- a boy scout, a priest, and an atomic
scientist. The plane develops engine trouble in mid flight.
The pilot rushes to the passenger compartment and exclaims:
"The plane is going down! We have only three parachutes, and
there are four of us. I have a large family waiting for me at
home, so I must survive!" With that he grabs a parachute and
flings himself into the air. The atomic scientist jumps to his
feet and declares, "You two must realize that I'm the smartest
person in the world; it would be a tragedy if my life were
snuffed out!" With that, he grabs a second parachute and leaps
into the atmosphere. With alarm and compassion on his face,
the priest looks at the young scout: "My son, I have no
family. The world can certainly get along without me. I am
ready to meet my Maker. You are still young and have so much
ahead of you - take the last parachute and make your exit!" At
this point, the scout interrupts the priest, "Hold on, Father!
Don't give up hope! We've been blessed by a greater power. The
world's smartest atomic scientist has just jumped out of the
plane wearing my knapsack!!"

Could this be a commentary on contemporary life?
Sometimes we get so into our own little areas and specialties
of life, that we don't even take the time to distinguish
between a knapsack and a parachute. We can be proud,
intellectual, scientific giants - yet not have enough common
sense to distinguish between a knapsack and a parachute.

My aim is not to poke fun at intellectual pursuit, but
rather to say that there is something to be said for a more
wholistic vision of life. That's what Trinity Sunday is all
about -- helping the church to see God more completely as God!
It is the only time in the church year that we celebrate a
doctrine rather than an event or divine happening. It is the
one time that we consciously seek to uncover the UNITY OF GOD
through his varied expressions of himself. It is the one time
that we try to get at the wholeness of God.

Let me try to illustrate using my youngest daughter.

Imagine sitting her in front of a painting by Monet or Cezanne. Or take her to a great musical event like last Tuesday evening at Centennial Hall. Or try to entice her to have dinner at an elegant gourmet restaurant? What is her reaction to all this? "That music is boring! Those pictures are dumb! Just give me a cheeseburger and fries!" It's not the art or the music or the food that is terrible; it's that the child hasn't developed the capacity to appreciate them yet!

Now imagine yourself being placed in the presence of the living God, and being asked: how much height, depth, length, and breadth of God's greatness, kindness, mercy and compassion will escape you? In the presence of God, you and I feel like a kindergartner at a great musical event or gourmet restaurant! That's why we need Trinity. We need a day when God invites us to extend our vision - a time to take in a little more of God than we ordinarily might do.

How do we get at that? Well, by getting beyond our own favorite facade to the real faces of God. Trinity Sunday challenges us to consider a more comprehensive picture of God. Granted, not more logical, but far more expansive! Thus, Trinity invites us to see God as "3-In-1." That is, to see that ONE GOD CAN HAVE THREE DIFFERENT FACES ... OR SELF-REFLECTIONS ... SELF-REVELATIONS! So let's look at the three faces of this one God!

The first face is that of Creator and Parent. This face is summarized in the creed when we say, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth." Luther summed up this article by saying: "I believe that God created me and all that exists; that He has given and still preserves, provides and protects me in body and soul." This is the least problematic of God's faces. It appeals to our sense of beauty, our sense of order, and our sense of right and wrong. We have all experienced this face of God in a multitude of ways this morning: We woke up and the sun was shining ... the house was still secured on the lot ... there was water for the morning shower ... there was food in the breadbasket ... the toaster and skillet and sausages were not floating in the air ... the grass and garden grew over night ... we did not torch our neighbor's house because his dog was barking ... we did not drive 100 mph to get to church. Order, beauty, and natural laws ... the face of God seen daily in creation.

Today has already been a day for rejoicing in the beauty of nature, the majesty of the heavens beyond us, the magic of friendships, the wonder of family life, and the big and little pleasures that daily greet us! These are all daily happenings for us ... these are not cosmic accidents ... they are the well-chosen gifts of a loving and graceful God. So it is that the first face of God affirms God as Creator!

But belief in a Creator God is not wholistic enough for a

Christian -- many religions reflect this singular face. The second face of God moves from the impersonal realm of nature to the intimate realm of flesh and touch and pain and pleasure ... to the reality of humanity!

Let me ask you a basic question at this point: How have you come up with your basic idea of what God is like? One clergy friend of mine said "his greatest day was when he realized that the divinity of Christ wasn't an effort to make us believe that Christ was Godlike, but rather that God is Christlike!" I really like that distinction! To the question, "What is God like?" the Christian answers: "God is like Jesus Christ."

How many of you can actually remember the following quote from a children's book published in the late 1800's: "God is very angry with children who behave wickedly, and he will punish them by letting them die while they are young and sending their souls to hell." That negative, damning image of God was offered to many of us in our development. Is it any wonder that many of us are overwhelmed with guilt, despair, and hopelessness?? No one ever told us that God is Christlike!

Jesus Christ is the "spittin image of God." The Law made God too impersonal, too distant, too authoritarian. The Greeks made God too abstract! So God took it upon himself to reveal himself in a way that he could be known -- as a person! His second face is Jesus Christ. So the next time someone makes a claim about God - ask yourself: Does this fit with what I know about Jesus Christ? If so, then you can believe it as a true reflection of the face of God!

Now maybe you had these two faces of God already clear in your vision. It's that third face that's troubling you -- that face of God the Holy Spirit. Well, there comes a time in everyone's life when he/she must move from the head to the heart. We know God through the face of nature and the person of Jesus Christ -- but do we know God from within ourselves?? The face of the Holy Spirit transforms God from an empty form into an inner energy! And this third face can make all the difference in the world of faith. For most of us - this third face is yet the challenge ... moving from a working idea of God out there in space or nature to a working power of God within us.

Possibly, George C. Scott (the great actor) had the best approach for this third face. He was asked: "George, how do you distinguish a good actor from a poor one? He responded, "I ask three questions: First, who predominates, the actor or the character? Second, is the emotion stereotypical or with imagination and depth? And third, is the actor really enjoying what he's doing?"

Those same three criteria need application to the third face of God regarding our faith. First, who predominates ...

who really gets the spotlight of our lives? Ourselves or God? Are we motivated by a sense of serving others ... or are we constantly seeking only the promotion of self? Secondly, how authentic are our convictions?? Is our presence here just a religious show, or are we here out of conviction and depth to a way of life? And lastly, does our faith in this 3-in-1 God bring us any enjoyment?? Do we really PRAISE GOD FROM WHOM ALL BLESSINGS FLOW??

Possibly the best way to see the face of God's Spirit is to catch a glimpse of the enthusiasm of his people. The word enthusiasm literally comes from the Greek, "en theos" -- "God in them." The face of the Spirit is reflected through the enthusiasm of God's people ... through God in them.

I have often said about myself, "I know I'm not the best preacher in the world, but if I am the worst, at least I'm going to be the worst with a lot of enthusiasm!" With a lot of God in me!

That's the goal the Christian community must look toward -- enthusiastically letting God's face be seen, even if it can't be seen perfectly! Serving others not for the spotlight effect, but just for the sheer enjoyment of reflecting the face of God, the Holy Spirit!

These are the faces of God that have always been and will always be. They are very down to earth faces ... revealed in nature, in humanity, and in the energy of Christ's body, the church! And yet, they are also mystical faces beyond the classification of doctrine or diagram or degrees.

Yet they are the same faces that are felt and tasted in the bread and wine of the altar -- mystically one God who revealed himself in three faces, but in all three faces offers the ONE power of love. So, come and touch and feel the face of God ... and then share the enthusiasm of that love by "giving it to the whole world, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. AMEN.

HOLY TRINITY (PENTECOST I)
Hope Lutheran Church, Toledo
May 29, 1988 (Memorial Day Weekend)
Peter R. Martyn, Pastor

"ONE AND ONLY ONE!"

Moses said, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with heart, soul, and might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. Deut. 6:4-7

Today is Trinity Sunday. It is a day when we say that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one, ONE AND ONLY ONE GOD! Trinity Sunday, like every Sunday, is a day when the church doesn't make real good sense. Because esp. today we say that God is three persons yet only one God. That's not very rational -- three, but yet one!

But that's our faith in God. That's the way we see him expressing himself ... as three distinct persons, yet the same God! We believe in a God who does not always have to make good sense. That's why we, the church, do things many times that are not totally rational, not totally meaningful, certainly not totally scientific. Our faith, and even more our practice, is not built upon totally rational systems of thought and action.

That may not be true for all Christians -- but certainly anyone who has come to a Lutheran worship service for the first time realizes that Lutherans are not totally rational and systematic, esp. in worship. Lutherans sit, stand, and kneel; sometimes they follow the pages sometimes they skip pages; sometimes they sing with gusto, sometimes they don't sing at all (esp. to show the pastor that they don't like a hymn); sometimes they use vestments, other times they try to be non-liturgical. Let's face it, it's hard to make a lot of rational sense out of Lutherans.

It reminds me of an Anglican bishop's story of young, devout Lutheran woman who was madly in love with an "unchurched" college co-ed. They started going steady ... then more steady ... and steadier, until finally one spring they were talking marriage. But the Lutheran co-ed, being so devoutly Lutheran, said she would only get married under one condition: he would have to attend Lutheran worship with her.

As you might imagine, the young man would have been somewhat confused in a congregational service - but he was really in left field among the Lutherans. He had heard that there was all kinds of standing and sitting at unexpected times; there was a never-ending requirement of page turning; he was told that the bulletins would be full of inserts/announcements; the people would respond to the pastor in wierd gregorian chants; and there would be a mixture of pieties ranging from holy-holies who crossed themselves to social-cronnies who came to worship primarily to chat with friends.

Sure enough! He got to the Lutheran service - and it was just as he had expected. People all of a sudden stood, while he of course was still sitting. And then after he had stood, they just as quickly sat down ... and he was standing by himself. He tried to sing with gusto, and then only realized that people were starring at him for being off-key. The longer the service went, the more nervous he became. He was particularly fearful to walk forward for communion ... not knowing how to eat the wafer or drink the wine ... not knowing whether God would zap him right there at the altar.

As the sermon began - he noticed that the sweat was rolling down his face. So he awkwardly reached in his pocket and got his hanky; but after drying his face, he couldn't get the hanky back in his pocket. After several tries, he just tucked it inside his belt in the front of his pants. A few moments later, his girlfriend looked at him, and shockingly whispered: "Is your fly open?" To which he quickly responded: "Is that what I'm supposed to do now??"

We Lutherans need to laugh at ourselves and our rigid practices esp. on Trinity Sunday. Because too often that's a real problem in being Lutheran -- we focus too much upon our Sunday morning practice, and then overlook the real principle, the real priority, and the real potential of our faith.

That's why we need a Trinity Sunday -- to get back to the ONE AND ONLY ONE reason for being here every Sunday: TO BETTER KNOW THE BASIC PRINCIPLE, THE BASIC PRIORITY, AND THE BASIC POTENTIAL OF OUR FAITH!

TRINITY SUNDAY ANNOUNCES ONE AND ONLY ONE PRINCIPLE: YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, SOUL, AND MIND ... AND YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BESIDES ME. Throughout history, every civilization has been tempted to worship many gods. It has always been socially acceptable to have many gods. Socrates was poisoned because he lured the Athenian youth away from the many Greek gods. No matter who conquered Israel - she was constantly expected to accept the gods of that culture, whether Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, or Rome. And why was Jesus crucified? Because he stretched monotheism too far -- he and his Father were not two, but one!! Trinity Sunday announces like no other day that there is ONE AND ONLY ONE GOD whom we worship -- God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit ... all and only one God!!

On the surface it would appear that we no longer have a problem with this principle of Trinity Sunday. After all, we certainly all believe in just ONE GOD! We are monotheists. We preach and teach that God is one Lord and Father of us all. But what principle do we practice -- have we also been tempted to worship many gods in our society. What do we find moms and dads diligently teaching their children? Are they instructing their

to be compassionate and generous like God the Father ... are they steeping their children in the importance of prayer and thanksgiving to God ... are they instilling a sense of awesome fear of God, so that their children would never think of profaning God's name? Do we teach our children to serve and sacrifice like Christ, or do we only given instructions about saving, securing, stockpiling, and shareholding? Do we reflect our love for God every moment of our walking and lying and sleeping? Or have we made "success" the only God to be worshipped by our children?? Have we made "materialism" the god that we want our children to aspire to? Have we told our children that "being winners" is all that counts in life? Have we made "happiness and hedonism" the gods to be satisfied?

There can be no doubt about it! We may no longer make graven images or other unsophisticated gods to worship -- but we have all violated the "ONE AND ONLY ONE" GOD principle of our faith. Trinity Sunday reminds us of our most valuable inheritance -- we have been blessed abundantly by ONE AND ONLY ONE GOD!! There is one and only one principle that is proper practice for our lives: TO LOVE THAT GOD WITH HEART, SOUL, MIND AND STRENGTH!!

But that of course leads to our ONE AND ONLY ONE PRIORITY of faith! Sometimes we church folk, esp. we preachers, talk so much about loving God and one another THAT WE GET THE WHOLE PRIORITY MIXED UP. Granted, it is vitally important for us to love God and each other. But that's not the priority of our faith! The priority is that GOD FIRST AND FOREMOST LOVES US (that's why we baptize Lauren as an infant today). We don't just say "God is love," we become immersed and vitalized by his love. It is not OUR LOVE that is a measure of God's ... it is God's love that is measured through us!!

The priority is that God has already given us an inheritance ... even before we asked for it! Can anyone doubt that on this Memorial Day weekend? As Americans, can there be any greater expression of God's inheritance -- freedoms of all kinds, foods of all varieties ... fellowship, fun, family, free time, facilities of all kinds. Is it any wonder we honor those who have fought for our continued freedom this weekend? No one in America could have the audacity to doubt our inheritance from God!

Before the beginning of time, before Columbus, before George Washington, before Reaganomics -- God had an infinite spasm of passion: HE CREATED EVERYTHING THAT IS ... HE GENERATED HIS SON JESUS CHRIST ... HE BREATHED HIS SPIRIT INTO HIS UNIVERSAL CHURCH: and then he said ... I WILL GIVE YOU ONE AND ONLY ONE PRIORITY -- SHARE THE INHERITANCE I HAVE GIVEN YOU WITH ALL FUTURE GENERATIONS, for I was thirsty, and you gave me drink, I was a stranger, and you welcomed me, I was hungry, and you fed me, I was naked, and you clothed me, I was imprisoned, and you visited me. For as you do it unto the least of these, you do it unto me.

There is ONE AND ONLY ONE priority of our faith in the one true God: WE ARE TO GIVE AWAY THE INHERITANCE THAT HE HAS FIRST GIVEN UNTO US! LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON, LIKE SPIRIT -- WE ARE ONE AND ONLY ONE AS WE LOVE AS HE HAS FIRST LOVED US!!

Obviously, that ONE AND ONLY ONE priority can only lead to on ONE AND ONLY ONE potential: we aspire to the things above, rather than merely being satisfied with things as they are. Or stated in the vernacular of today's gospel lesson: WE SEEK TO BE BORN AGAIN EVERY DAY! Our worship here today is not just another humdrum moment with God -- it is another opportunity for God to lift us up to his heights, his goals, his standards, his opportunities for our mission and ministry.

As faithful Christians, we do not talk about "going to heaven," we seek "heaven on earth." "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." When John says, God so loved the world that he gave his Son that whosoever believes will have everlasting life -- he's not merely referring to some place up above the clouds. He's saying that "in Christ" we now have the potential to bring everlasting life down to earth. Obviously, everlasting life does not mean that we breathe forever, but that we love like Christ forever. We get beyond grubbing for little things and we finally go for the gusto of greatness - we aspire to the heavenly qualities of God.

Our ONE AND ONLY ONE potential reminds me of the story of the boy on his father's western ranch. His father was concerned that his son was taking too many risks. So he called to his son and said, "Son, there are two things I want you to understand on this ranch: first, be careful in turning over rocks. You never know when a rattler is under one. Second, don't ever climb to that high ledge on the north range. There is an eagle nesting up there ... and in protecting her nest she may attack you and cause you to fall." Well, you all know what those cautions did for this red-blooded boy: THEY BECAME CHALLENGES. Soon the boy was overturning rocks galore. And on the first clear day, he was high on the ledge of the north range. Fortunately, the eagle was gone from the nest.

Approaching the nest, he spied a large egg ... grabbing it, he put it under his shirt and headed for home. He put it on the old hen's nest while she was away ... and sure enough, when she returned she nestled on the egg and caused it to hatch. Soon there was an eaglet growing up among the baby chicks. They mockingly chirped at him, regarding him as a big, awkward chick. But it wasn't long before he was stretching his wings ... first he was above the fenceposts, soon he was over the roof of the barn, and finally on a clear day ... he set his sights on a nearby mountain range never to return again to grub only for a few kernels of corn in the chicken coop.

That's the ONE AND ONLY ONE POTENTIAL of Trinity Sunday -- God has given us the potential to be eagles, not mere chickens cooped up by festidious rules, regulations, and worship routines. Through the power of God's spirit, we are born again every day ... to reach new heights, to set new goals, to soar to the mountain tops of love and service. THAT'S THE ONE AND ONLY MESSAGE OF TRINITY SUNDAY ... ONE GOD, ONE INHERITANCE, ONE OPPORTUNITY: ONE AND ONLY ONE LIFE TO FULFILL GOD'S PRIORITY AND POTENTIAL FOR US ... TO SHARE HIS INHERITANCE OF LOVE, FREEDOM AND SACRIFICE WITH ALL FUTURE GENERATIONS.

AMEN.

“The-Gospel-In-A-Verse”

Nicodemus, a Pharisee & leader of the Jews asked, How can anyone be born after having grown old? ... Jesus answered, Truly, I tell you ...you must e born from above. ... For God so loved thew orld that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who beleives in him may not perish but may have etenal life.” John 3:4,7,16

One of the first Bible passages I learned and memorized is from today’s gospel. Many times at football games & especially golf tournaments you will see a large placard in camera view showing these letters: JOHN 3:16. If any anyone were to ask me for a favorite Bible passage, I would say: John 3:16. It is a classic gospel statement ... often called “The-Gospel-In-A-Verse ... The Little Gospel.” It sums up God’s whole purpose for his children: “In believing in Jesus ... we are assured of God’s love forever & ever!”

And yet as many times as we read this verse and use it for many occasions -- we sometimes forget its context. It was the concluding response to Nicodemus’ question, “How can anyone be born again?” And that leads to the first and most important point to be made on Trinity Sunday: most of the greatest expressions of the gospels are actually answers to questions!!

Just look at a few questions & answers: Jesus asked Peter: *Who do you say that I am?* and Peter responded: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!” The disciples asked, *“Who is the greatest in the kingdom?”* and Jesus called to him a child, and said, “Truly, unless you become like a child you cannot enter the kingdom of God.” And Peter asked, *“Lord how often shall a brother sin against me and I forgive him? Seven times?”* And Jesus answered, “Not seven times, but seventy times seven (infinitely!).” And the lawyer stood up to test Jesus asking, *“What shall I do to inherit eternal life?”* and Jesus answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind ... and your neighbor as yourself.” And the lawyer then asked, *“And who is my neighbor?”* And after some prodding, Jesus helped this lawyer understand that “a neighbor is the one who shows mercy to any forsaken person.” And the rich ruler asked, *“Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”* and Jesus answered, “Sell all that you have & distribute it to the poor, and you will have a treasure in heaven; then come follow me.”

These and hundreds of others illustrate that the gospels most profound statements are often made in answer to questions. Thus, today’s gospel: a Pharisee, a ruler of great power, an elder & teacher of the community, Nicodemus by name, was perplexed by a deeper question of life. And which one of us has never been so perplexed?!? Just this week, we ask: “How can God allow a woman who nurtured and advocated for so many children die at 49 years?” Ten of her children are deeply perplexed with that question right now! But as Pastor Imhoff answered, “Our purpose is to do God’s will in whatever time we’re given.” To be a faithful Christian does not mean we have all the answers -- but it does mean that we must allow the questions to be asked if we are truly the church. That’s why Jesus’ followers called him “Rabbi” -- because he was a good teacher. And good teachers love questions. Only unprepared teachers

dread questions; only uncertain teachers fear questions; only teachers more concerned about themselves than the truth see questions as a threat. Questions have always been the way that Christ and the Christian tradition have given new birth and new life to the faith. In fact, a Gallup poll recently took a survey of "unchurched Americans." These people said they were hungering for a place where their questions & doubts would be explored; in fact, of those who returned to a church, 50% said they did so "because they had found a pastor & congregation with whom they could openly discuss religious questions and doubts!"

Today's gospel clearly says one of the reasons we know God loves us so much is that he never evades our questions. But John 3:16, just like Isaiah's call in the Old Testament, says that God's purpose is not only to answer questions -- but even more important -- **TO URGE NEW LIFE & A NEW SPIRIT FOR HIS FOLLOWERS!** When called, Isaiah was tempted to hang onto his **OLD LIFE** - his guilt, greed & unworthiness. The symbolism of the hot coal - just like the water of baptism - is that **GOD HAS PURIFIED AND CLEANSED US.** God's purpose is to refashion human fallenness into divine renewal! With both Isaiah & Nicodemus, God did not allow yesterday's impotence to excuse tomorrow's possibilities!! From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible's message & God's purpose has but one theme: TO MAKE ALL THINGS NEW!! He used prophets, wisdom writers, poets and evangelists ... and when the time came, he used his own Son ... and He allowed his Son to die on a cross in order to get the message across **THAT HE WANTS A NEW SPIRIT OF THINGS IN THIS WORLD.**

That was his exact vision for Nicodemus: God told him he must be born anew!! "To be born anew" does not mean that God expects anyone to become a "Bible spouting fanatic!" But "to born anew/from above" does mean that THE POWER OF CHRIST now becomes the order for our lives -- that his gifts of mercy, kindness, gentleness, self-control, patience, love & humility are the realities that now shape our human character & actions. These gifts are the same gifts for God as Father, Son & Holy Spirit -- they are one ... and we are to BE ONE IN THESE GIFTS!

That's the essence of Trinity Sunday--and every other Sunday which celebrates the power of God as Father, Son & Holy Spirit. We profess that these are the gifts that shape us ANEW ... make us different than we used to be. I don't want to immortalize Kathy Schaedler today ... because, like me, she too had her faults and shortcomings. But there is no way that any human being could nurture some 400 different children in 20 years without the gifts of the Spirit. Kathy WAS NOT born with God's gifts of gentleness, patience, peace, joy, self-control and love. But through her constant nourishment from Father, Son & Holy Spirit -- she was shaped by these gifts. So shaped that after having several of her own children, she said to Jeff: "we're going to make certain that every child needing a loving & caring home will have a chance for it through us!" That's the **SPIRIT OF MAKING THINGS NEW!** It's not talking about "caring for children" -- it's taking them in ... and giving them the tender loving care of God! As John 3:16 says ... "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son." When you believe in that Son as your Savior, then "you give your life

"as a sacrifice for others because that's what you have first received from Him!"

Like Kathy Schaedler, God simply calls each of us to ask ourselves: **IN WHAT WAY WILL WE GIVE THE WORLD A NEW LIFE?!!** It may not be through children. But like Nicodemus, each of us is called "to be born from above" -- to give the gifts of the Spirit!

Finally - the last dimension of God as Father, Son & Holy Spirit: whether it's from Father, or from Son, or from the Spirit -- we always know its God's Word if it is Good News!! How desperately this world needs a vision of Good News! As we approach the 21st century -- our society is overwhelmed by Bad News! One author describes our world as a scene filled with physical and spiritual rubbish! He says, "we have relaxed our standards too far: whether its language or violence or vulgarity or nudity or cheating or any of the other sacred standards from above. Instead of living by the standards from above, we seem to be settling for the standards from below!" We need to renew our commitment to the Father's Commandments ... to the Son's forgiving grace and mercy ... and to the Spirit's gifts of good judgment, gentleness, patience and self-control! One God -- but three powerful expressions of His Good News as Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

And the best Good News from the gospel today is that even when we are not committed to Him -- he remains committed to us! And we know that because God again uses an outsider (a Pharisee) to get that message of Good News to us! It's like the unattractive & homeless child who was considered unmanageable and beyond control by the staff & attendants at an orphanage. One day the director saw this child heading for the front gate; he was certain she was going to run away. Quietly, he followed her. When she reached the gate, she stopped and placed a note on the branch of a tree that hung over the entrance. Then she walked back to the orphanage and went again entered the front door.

The director walked over to the tree and opened the note. In large, carefully drawn, crayon letters, it read: "TO ANYONE WHO FINDS THIS: I LOVE YOU!" He never expected such a message; but he treasured that message and put it in his pocket for keeping; it was the Best News he had heard for weeks.

God once also used a tree to send a message. The world, even the disciples, thought that he was running away on Good Friday. But instead of a note, he attached His Son to the tree. And for those of us who have bothered to read the message on that tree, God says: "TO ANYONE WHO FINDS THIS LIFE, you can be assured, I LOVE YOU!"

God has not forsaken the world. He so loves the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him will be saved. That's the Good News that overcomes all the rubbish of this world. Today, and every day, God answers life's questions by saying: "Be born anew to my message of love in Jesus and His Spirit!" And if we're really faithful like Kathy Schaedler & Isaiah-- we readily respond by saying, "Here I am Lord, Send me!!" And as we have seen in Kathy & other angels -- that's the beginning of a new purpose & vision for the whole world!!

AMEN.