**The Holy Trinity**

**June 7, 2020**

**Text—Matthew 28:16-20**

Our country has had a very difficult couple of months, hasn’t it? First, we’ve had to deal with the pandemic, which is still going on and still affecting our lives. Thankfully, services here have resumed, but they’re very different from what we’re used to. We don’t have a full sanctuary anymore, we have to sit apart from each other, and we can’t sing yet. That’s not ideal, but we are at least in church again, which is the most important thing.

But we’ve also had in the last couple of weeks more social unrest and violence. Once again, we had a high-profile violent incident with law enforcement in which a black man was killed, and once again, that has led to riots in the streets and destruction of property in cities all across the country. At this point, it’s hard to know who is right and who is wrong in this situation. It’s hard to know how as Christians we should be responding to this, because the situation is so complicated. We’re worried about the state of our society, and what kinds of effects these incidents will have on our country. We’re worried that things are never going to improve, and that we’re going to be stuck fighting the same societal battles forever.

So in the face of these difficulties, what we really want to hear in our Sunday morning worship is a gracious and encouraging word from our Lord, one that is relevant and speaks to our situation right now. And that’s exactly what I have for you this morning. Today, in the midst of this pandemic and social unrest, I am going to talk to you about something that is highly engaging, encouraging, and relevant: the doctrine of the Trinity!

Now, why would I want to talk about the doctrine of the Trinity in the midst of these issues? Is that really the most important thing I could be doing right now? Well, for starters, today is Trinity Sunday, a major festival of the church year, so I’m obligated to talk about the Trinity in this sermon. But there’s also great hope, comfort, and encouragement in the doctrine of the Trinity, as hard as that might be for some of us to believe. We’re used to treating the Trinity as a litmus test of orthodoxy, a doctrinal box that you need to check off intellectually in order to be a right-thinking Christian. But oftentimes, it can be hard for us to see the relevance of it, especially during difficult times. We’d rather listen to something, anything other than a lecture about the three persons of God in his single divine essence. We’re not interested in learning about the Greek terms *homoousios* or *perichoresis*. But as I said, the triune nature of God actually is a source of encouragement for us, and it does speak relevantly to our situation right now. Here’s what I mean.

First of all, consider God the Father. If you remember back to your catechism classes, you’ll recall that you talked about the Father in your lessons on the first article of the creed. And the first article connects the Father with God’s act of creation. We know that God created all things in this world. He made the heavens and earth, and he made everything in them. But he is no deistic God; he did not just made everything, set it in motion, and then sit back to watch it run. No, he remains intimately involved in every aspect of his creation. Nothing happens on this earth without his permission or intervention. If God were not constantly working in his creation, it would simply cease to exist, and we would all die instantly. So God not only *was* the creator: he still *is* the creator! He continues to create even now, causing plants to grow and animals and humans to be born. And because he created all things, he remains in control of them all. There is nothing that exists outside of his gracious reign; he is in charge of everything. And because he loves the world that he has made, he will continue to preserve it and take care of it even to the end of the age.

The applications for us in a time of pandemic and social unrest are obvious: God is our creator who still takes care of us even in the midst of this virus that threatens our lives, and this violence that threatens our society. We can be confident in our Lord’s gracious provision for us, because he loves us as his dear children and does not want us to suffer harm. And we can also be confident in knowing that not even this uncontainable virus or uncontrollable violent actors are outside of God’s control. They do nothing without his permission, and even though they have wreaked havoc thus far, they are not all-powerful. God will not allow them to destroy our society completely. We will recover from this. If medieval Europe could survive the Black Death, which killed about a third of its population, then we can survive the coronavirus. If our nation could survive a full-scale Civil War back in the 1860’s, it can survive this as well. God will continue to preserve us and he will never withdraw his gracious hand from us. He protects us not only from the virus and the violence, but also from everything else that has happened as a result of them: economic instability, loneliness, depression, destruction. Even in the midst of all of these trials, he remains our creator who loves us dearly. He would not waste his energy to create us and then abandon us when something bad comes along. No, he remains with us through it all as a loving Father does for his dear children. We need not fear the absence of God, because God is never absent from us. He is intimately involved with us and with every other speck of his creation, which is a source of great hope and encouragement for us in all circumstances.

But the question remains: what if we do get sick from the virus? What if we do suffer at the hands of violent actors? What if we are killed by them? God is the creator of all things, and he protects and preserves them, but that’s not stopping a lot of people from getting sick, getting attacked, and dying. What does God have for us when that happens? Well, we return again to the doctrine of the Trinity, but this time God the Son. Despite the Father’s creation and preservation of the world, the fact remains that things don’t work perfectly here. This isn’t God’s fault: it’s a result of human sin. When Adam and Eve ate that fruit in the garden, sin and death were introduced into the world, and they have caused all sorts of problems ever since. We daily deal with our own sinful natures tempting us to do wrong, and with other people sinning against us. The specter of death hovers over us as soon as we are born, because we know that one day, we will die. Even if the coronavirus or a mob doesn’t get us, something else eventually will; it’s inevitable. This is where God the Son, Jesus Christ, comes in. He came to earth and suffered everything that we human beings suffer: sickness, weakness, violence. In all of this, he never sinned once, never disobeyed his Father a single time. For that perfect obedience, his reward was rejection by his own people, excruciating torture, and a shameful death on a cross. But it was through that sacrifice that Jesus dealt with sin once and for all: he atoned for it by shedding his blood, so that the wrath of God was turned away from his fallen human creatures. And on the third day, Jesus rose again from the dead, thus conquering death and breaking its grip upon humanity. He has promised to return on the last day to raise his faithful people from the dead and give them eternal life in his Father’s kingdom. This is what Jesus has done for all people, and simply by faith in him we will receive everything he promises us.

Again, it is easy to see how all of this applies to our pandemic situation right now. We know that, even though God remains our creator and protector, we are still vulnerable to this virus and to violence because of sin. We know that we could become infected and get very sick. We know that we could come into conflict with an angry mob. We know that we could die. But we also know that we have a Savior who has died and risen again to rescue us from the clutches of sin and death. Through faith in him, we have become his people, and he will not allow anything to snatch us out of his hands. This means that ultimately, we do not have to live in fear of this virus or this violence, because we know that Jesus Christ has saved us from them. He has defeated everything in this world that could ever harm us, and on the last day, he will make that victory manifest. We will rise from the dead to eternal life, a life free from viruses, poverty, loneliness, and anything else that this world can throw at us. No matter how bad things may get in this life, we will look to the future with an unshakable hope, knowing that our hope is not in vain. God the Son has redeemed us from our sins and given us the promise of eternal life. There can be no greater source of hope in a pandemic than that.

But it’s not always that easy, is it? It’s simple to talk about how we shouldn’t be afraid or lose heart in the face of the problems of this world, but it’s quite another thing to actually put that into practice. We yet remain sinners, and our trust and confidence in God are not as strong as they should be. And they never will be in this life. But the doctrine of the Trinity has an answer for that too. When we were baptized, we received God the Holy Spirit into our hearts, and he has dwelt there ever since. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the “Helper” or “Comforter,” and that is exactly what he does for us. He helps us in our weaknesses and comforts us when the trials of this life seem overwhelming. He guides us into all truth and reminds us of everything that Jesus has done on our behalf. He strengthens and preserves our faith, and he will continue to do so for the rest of our lives. Without the Holy Spirit to guide us, we would immediately fall back into the darkness of sin and unbelief, with no hope for the future to comfort and sustain us. But thankfully, Jesus has sent us the Holy Spirit, and he will never leave us. With his help, we will trust wholeheartedly in Jesus’ promises until he returns on the last day.

Once again, we can easily see how the Holy Spirit’s work is relevant to us in our situation today. Now more than other times, it would be easy for our faith in God to waver. We haven’t been in church together much for almost three months, so our fellow believers have not been able to support us as much as usual. We haven’t seen some of our family or friends in quite some time, and that can make us feel very lonely. We might be suffering financially from this pandemic as well, and that can make us anxious and fearful about the future. We also see all of these violent images on the news and wonder how long it will take for the violence to reach us. But through it all, the Holy Spirit is right here with us, reminding us constantly about how much God loves us and how much Jesus sacrificed to save us. He is directing our focus to Jesus, whose promises to us stand forever. He is strengthening our trust in God even in a situation that puts it greatly to the test, and because of him, we will come out of this with our faith intact. The Holy Spirit will not allow us to fall away from the faith or sink into despair, because he will help us to fix our eyes on Jesus and remember his promises. We are destined for salvation and eternal life in God’s kingdom, and the Holy Spirit will never let us forget that.

So as it turns out, the doctrine of the Trinity is actually supremely comforting and relevant for our situation today, because the sum total of the Christian faith is found in this doctrine. God the Father created us and continues to take care of us, God the Son redeemed us from sin and death and gave us the promise of eternal life, and God the Holy Spirit has kept us strong in the faith and will continue to do so until the last day. To say that the doctrine of the Trinity isn’t helpful in a pandemic or social unrest is like saying that Christianity in general isn’t helpful in those situations. The Trinity is far more than an item in a doctrinal checklist: it is the very means by which the God of the universe has revealed himself to us and given us the hope of salvation. There’s a reason why, in our Gospel text for today, Jesus told his disciples to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: because it is only as the Trinity that God has truly revealed himself to his people. So on this Trinity Sunday in the COVID-19 pandemic, and during riots in the streets of our major cities, we will rejoice in and give thanks for the triune nature of our God. We will not dismiss the doctrine of the Trinity as an irrelevant intellectual exercise, but will rather embrace it as essential for knowing who God is for us. It is as the Trinity that God has saved us and brought us to himself, and it is as the Trinity that we will worship him and find hope for the future. Blessed be God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit! Blessed be our triune God indeed. Amen.