

The Holy Trinity

Sermon at St. Luke's Chapel, 19 June 2019 by Ari Savuoja

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John 3:1-15

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.'

3 Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.'

4 'How can someone be born when they are old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!'

5 Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again."

8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.'

9 'How can this be?' Nicodemus asked.

10 'You are Israel's teacher,' said Jesus, 'and do you not understand these things? 11 Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man. 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.'

Studies have been conducted in Finland about people's faith. Most people say that they think God is a kind of high being somewhere in the beyond. Or, their response is equally vague. Only a few people are able to accurately describe the God they believe in.

Today is the day of the Holy Trinity, a holiday dedicated to God's trinity. The Holy Trinity of God is one of the specialties of our Christian faith, one might even say of its surprises. In the Bible, there is no mention of the word "trinity". But nevertheless, the doctrine of the triune God is one of the basic pillars of our Christian faith. Without it our Christian faith would not be Christian faith.

Even though the Bible does not actually mention the word "trinity", we can clearly read in the Bible the idea of the three personalities of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

*The most well-known reference about God's trinity in the Bible is probably the statement of baptism and missions: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."
(Matthew 28:19)*

The second example: In the first chapter of the Old Testament we talk of God in plural form, namely in the Creation, Genesis 1:26: "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.'"

The third example: God appeared to Abraham in the figure of three men near the great trees of Mamre (Genesis 18: 1-14).

The fourth example: In the Bible, God is talking oftentimes talking or referred to in a triple form, for example, as the word "holy" occurs three times: "Holy, Holy, Holy."

The Bible thus tells us that the one God manifests Himself to us as three different persons, each of whom is the true God (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit): the one eternal, without beginning, almighty, omnipresent, all-knowing, all-merciful, all loving.

Each person of God has a special task: The Father's special task is to create, the Son's special task is to redeem us from sin, and the Holy Spirit's special task is to sanctify. The Father has created us, the Son has redeemed us, and the Spirit has sanctified us and is sanctifying us daily.

All three persons of God are equally important. The Holy Trinity is like a tripod with three legs: none of these three legs can be taken away. If so, the entire tripod collapses.

However, it is essential to note that there is only one God; one triune God. One + one + one = one. Three Gods are one God. Here our normal thinking seems not quite accurate. The fault is not in God, but in our weak and limited understanding.

The theme of this Trinity Day is titled "The Concealed God". God has told and revealed us the necessary things, but apart from these, there are still many things unrevealed and left beyond our knowledge and understanding.

Even though our God has revealed us so much about Himself in the Bible, He is also partly concealed from us. We will never get to know all of the greatness of God here

during our life on earth. In Heaven, instead, we will look at Him "face to face", as the apostle Paul says.

The Apostle Paul says according to 1 Corinthians 13:12: "Now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. Only in Heaven we will know God fully, as God now knows us fully.

We could talk a lot of or about God and the Trinity. It is, of course, good that this matter is also thought and discussed, but theoretical knowledge alone will never reach the essence of the Trinity itself. The essence of the trinity is that God has something to give and to say about our lives.

For example, it is important to believe that our Lord is truly man and God so that He can reconcile our sins. Here too, it is emphasised that salvation comes entirely from God, not from ourselves. We do not have to – and we cannot – add anything to it.

Sometimes such doctrines may sound difficult. With regard to the Trinity, however, we just need to content ourselves with what the Bible tells us: that there is only one God and yet there are three persons, each of whom is as truly God with one another.

We must not go beyond what is written in the Word of God, as Paul said, "Do not go beyond what is written." (1 Corinthians 4:6) Perhaps we, modern humans, who are accustomed to questioning everything, have a particularly high degree of inability to set ourselves boundaries in this respect.

But when we let ourselves be at the mercy of God's word and God's promises in this matter, we will certainly rely on the fact that salvation is alone by grace, alone in faith, alone by Christ.

For our salvation, then, we have a triune God: the doctrine of the Trinity is not just a theory or a concept that is difficult to understand. The reason for this is also the most important attribute of God: God's love for humankind. In His love, God the Father has sent His Son to save the world because of the sins we have committed. The Holy Spirit brings to a living understanding in us all of what has been told to us in the Bible about our salvation.

This was also the case with Nicodemus in the Gospel! Nicodemus was saved from this imperfect and sinful world for eternal life by believing in Jesus, our Lord! As Nicodemus, today we too can put our faith in Christ!

Let's pray: Dear Heavenly Father. We thank and honour You that You alone are the only God – there is no other God than You. We thank and praise You for having our sins reconciled in Your Son Jesus Christ; and with His blood He paid for the guilt of our sins. We thank and praise You, the only God, that the Holy Spirit guides us and leads us in Your way, so that no evil we encounter each day, can drive us away from You, but that You will surely bring us to the home of Heaven in due course of time. Amen.