

# Written Copy Acts 2:36-39 “Mysterious Work by Mysterious Trinity”

Holy Trinity Sunday

Sunday, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024

## Text: Acts 2:36-29

<sup>36</sup> Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." <sup>37</sup> Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" <sup>38</sup> And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

## The text's intent

Peter uses Scripture to reveal that the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel that amazed the crowd had the purpose of gathering them to hear the Gospel testimony of Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah. They knew the miracles He performed which were done to be the attestation by the Father that this was the Messiah He had sent. Instead of believing they turned Him over to be crucified by men with no regard for the will of God. Yet it was the Father working through all this to fulfill His plan of salvation announced and put into action since the Fall. Through this Jesus was shown to be the atoning sacrifice for all mankind. The proof of this is His resurrection and ascension to the place of rule over all mankind, fulfilling the prophecies of David. At the Father's right hand and through the proclamation of this message, all His enemies who refuse this Gospel message will be subjugated before Him on Judgement Day. And from His exalted place both Father and Son send the Holy Spirit who comes to break and convict hearts with the truth of the Law, they killed the Messiah, and heal and restore through the Gospel united with water in baptism. The Gospel message being delivered is that in Christ their sins and their guilt over them are sent away never to return. The Spirit comes to deliver this free gift of grace that faith which holds and confesses Jesus Christ and His work of atonement is for each person who believes in Him as Lord and Savior.

## Focus Statement:

The Trinity is always working together in all things. All were involved in the original Creation, and all Three are involved in the recreation and restoration that is conversion of individual souls. The Father planned it and sent the Son who became man and accomplished it for all men by becoming mankind's atoning sacrifice. The Spirit comes sent by the Father and the Son to work through the Word the miracle of repentance by which Jesus' atoning sacrifice is made personal in each believer's life.

## Function Statement:

### Why it's important to know:

In our attempt to understand the Trinity who is beyond understanding we can pigeonhole their work in a way that loses how the Trinity works together for our salvation. We can also lose sight of our call to work with our God in His work to keep us in faith.

### What the hearer should do as a result:

Grow in our knowledge and understanding of the Trinity's combined effort of sacrificial and unconditional love that is conversion, and their work to keep us in repentant faith. Work with the Triune God in His mission to keep us in repentant faith unto life everlasting by regularly availing ourselves of the means of grace.

## Subject Sentence: The Trinity's Miraculous Work of Love in You

## Introduction: Choosing Church Carpet Color

There was once a Church that decided it needed to replace the carpet in the Sanctuary. So, they scheduled a congregational meeting to decide on what color. Many great ideas were put forth as to what the best color for the carpet should be. Some chose green to match the color of the banners and paraments for a good portion of the Church year, the summer-long celebration of Sundays following Pentecost. They also cited that green was used for the Season of Epiphany which comes after Christmas and before Lent.

But others suggested red would be a more appropriate color since red was the liturgical color used for the banners and paraments during the celebration of Pentecost, which marks the very birth of the New Testament Church. It also is used for the celebration of the re-birth of the Church from the errors thrust upon it in the Middle Ages which is Reformation.

But others put forward Blue as being the appropriate color since it was the Liturgical color for Advent, which reminds us of Christ coming in the incarnation as well as His coming again in glory on the Last Day. This group also argued that they felt blue would match well with the red and green liturgical colors of the other times of the year.

And speaking of matching, others put forward how white would actually go with any of the aforementioned colors since it was neutral. Plus, it was the color of the most important Church festival, the Easter Resurrection, not to mention Holy Trinity Sunday and Thanksgiving. While all that is true, this choice was quickly shot down since it would be hard to keep clean, readily showing dirt and stains from spilled communion wine.

Each group had their reasons for sticking with their color. The end result was the formation of competing camps that could not come together and unify on one particular color. The meeting was adjourned and re-scheduled a month later. But that meeting also failed to develop a consensus, as well as all those that followed. Eventually the problem of replacing the carpet became a moot point as the infighting caused the congregation to dwindle in number until they were forced to sell the building and vacate.

While this is an extreme example, each of us knows how hard it can be for a group of people to come together and unite around one specific plan or purpose. It's hard even when it comes to the less important decisions like the color of carpet, let alone the heavier more important decisions. If a consensus is going to come about it usually needs to happen in smaller committees with a smaller number of people meeting and talking things over. But even then, it can be hard to reach a consensus on even minor things. That's just the way things work in this world, even in the Church. But that's not the way things work when it comes to the Triune God.

## **Our Attempt to Understand the Trinity by Assigning Functions**

As we gather today to celebrate and recognize the Triune nature of our God, which means He is Three Persons yet one God, we must admit we really don't understand what that actually means. As an example of how difficult it is to get a handle on it, consider the length

and repetition of the Athanasian Creed which was drawn up to be the consummate confession of our God who is Three, but at the same time One. We understand the “One God” part, but how is it that this “One God” can also be said to exist in as “Three Persons”. When we think of “three persons” we think of three unique individuals which have their own purposes, ideas, jobs, and functions. Knowing how difficult it is for us to come to a consensus on the small things, we wonder how the Trinity does it when it comes to ruling over all things, especially with the direction our world is headed in today.

So how do we go about trying to wrap our minds around this concept of the Triune God who is beyond our understanding? We focus on the part that we can understand, the Three Persons aspect. And the simplest way is to focus on what the Apostles Creed lays out as the job descriptions for each member of the Trinity. The First article deals with God the Father and His work of Creating and sustaining all things. The Second Article deals with God the Son and His work to redeem and make right the pinnacle of the Father’s Creation-mankind, which has fallen away into sin.

When it comes to the Third Article of the Creed it deals with the work of the Holy Spirit. And what is listed there seems to be a bunch of loosely connected stuff : “the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints, the Resurrection of the Body, and the Life Everlasting. It’s kind of like the catch all for the rest of the important things about God. We assign the responsibility for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Article work to the Holy Spirit. We give this the general title: “Sanctification”. It comes from a Latin word “Sanctus” which translated into English means “Holy”. Makes sense when you think about the Service of the Sacrament, doesn’t it? After the preface we always sing one of the liturgical hymns that repeat the words of the Saraphim in our Old Testament Reading: “Holy, Holy, Holy”. That’s why this liturgical song is called The Sanctus. Therefore Sanctification describes the process of making or setting something apart as holy. What does that mean? It is the work the Spirit does continuing to change and produce in us what God the Father declares us to be in baptism: holy, sinless, and set apart to be useful workers in the Kingdom of God, the Church.

So, when we separate the members of the Trinity into individual persons who are assigned individual gifts we think we have a better handle on this concept of three in one. We think of each as having their own little box, their own area of responsibility they each focus on, kind of at the exclusion of the other two who are busy working in their own boxes. Perhaps we see them as working together in the same manner as tag team wrestling, where each wrestler competes in a portion of the bout, but then tags his partner and passes the job off to him. But seeing the Trinity at work in this way would be wrong.

### **How Each Member Works Together to Accomplish the Unified Purpose**

Take for example the work of Creating the universe. This is assigned mainly to God the Father, and with good reason. **Genesis 1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.** Here God the Father is described as the architect, the Master builder who started with nothing and created everything that our eyes can see, taste, touch, and feel. But what do we see in **Genesis 1:2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness**

**was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.** The Holy Spirit is present too. He's not off to the side waiting until the Father has got around to creating man and woman so they can fall from grace, and He can do His work. He's there from the very beginning present and involved. Then we read in **Genesis 1:3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.** We see God speaking at the beginning of each day of Creation, speaking everything He is creating into existence.

But which member of the Trinity is actually doing this speaking? **John 1:1-3 <sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.** The person of the Trinity that we call "The Word Made Flesh", which is God the Son who became Christ Jesus, was there at the beginning with the Father and the Spirit speaking everything into existence according to the will and plan of the Father.

This is the Triune God working together in perfect unity to accomplish the important task of creating the Universe. And the clearest example of their working together in unity of purpose and function is when it came time to bring into existence the pinnacle of Creation, that which the Triune God created everything else for. **Genesis 1:26-27 <sup>26</sup> Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." <sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.** Here we have the mystery and majesty of the Triune God at work in a nutshell. "Let **us**", plural, make man in **our** image." So "God" singular, "created man in His own image", singular. As you read through the Creation account you never see Trinity having to sit down and have a Board Meeting on how to proceed. They are always in agreement of purpose, plan, and execution. And they work together to accomplish that singular plan in perfect unity.

The same thing is true in the Triune God's work of re-creation, His work to restore all things to the original sinless unbroken perfection which was lost in the Fall. We call this work Redemption or "Justification": making sinful mankind justified in the presence of God, or making Him "righteous", in right standing with no charges of sin against him.

We assign this work to God the Son who became man in the womb of the Virgin Mary. But even in this we see the Triune God at work in perfect unity. **Luke 1:34-35** <sup>34</sup> **And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”** <sup>35</sup> **And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.** Here we have the Father, fulfilling His promise to Adam and Eve after the Fall that one of Eve’s descendants would come to crush the head of the serpent Satan. According to the Father’s timing He sends the angel to announce that miraculous event that is the incarnation. And how is it that a virgin will conceive? She will be “overshadowed” by the Holy Spirit. What does that mean, that she is overshadowed? No idea. That is part of the mysterious supernatural work of the Spirit that is beyond our understanding. But here He is, at work, as a key part of bringing about this Triune God’s work of Redemption.

Then there is the implementation of this work of Redemption for all mankind. **Acts 2:23-24** <sup>23</sup> **this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.** <sup>24</sup> **God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.** God the Father’s plan from before the foundation of the world, knowing before He created mankind that they would fall into sin, but creating them anyway. And when the time was right according to His plan, He sent God the Son to become man, the God Man, fully God, yet fully Man. This God man, Jesus of Nazareth, set aside the glory and power that was rightfully His to live the same kind of life you and I live, except without sin. He didn’t totally rid Himself of that divine power, but only used it to fulfill the Father’s plan and mission for Him directed by the Holy Spirit who descended upon Him in baptism.

All Three work together to fulfill the Father’s plan and mission. And what was that plan and mission? That He suffer and die at the hands of lawless men. This was not evil men gaining an upper hand over Jesus, or subverting the Father’s plan, although that’s what it looked like at the time. Peter correctly states that this was the fulfillment of the Father’s definite plan and foreknowledge. This was how the Son of God became the Savior of the world, by suffering and dying on the cross to be the atoning sacrifice of all mankind. How was He able to suffer for all the sins of all the people who have ever lived or will ever live? How was He able to withstand that pain and suffering in His human body? That is a mystery beyond our understanding. But we know what stood behind it: the supernatural sacrificial and unconditional love that the three members of the Trinity have for all mankind, that they have for you.

And in an equally mysterious and supernatural event, the Father raised the Son to everlasting life. And after He proved to His disciples the truth of the resurrection He ascended to the right hand of the Father. What does that mean? Where is the right hand of the Father? We call it heaven, but that is a reality that is beyond our understanding. What it means for you, and I, is that Jesus’ work of atonement was successful and was accepted for all men. There is no reason any person should be condemned to everlasting torment.

And the Triune God's gives that work of Christ to us through the work of the Holy Spirit. **Acts 2:38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit came and descended upon you just as He did Jesus in His baptism. He was present with the baptismal water that is united with the Word that is the Gospel, united with God the Father's definite plan and promise, fulfilled in God the Son's death and resurrection, and delivered to you by God the Holy Spirit in your baptism. That Word of promise is that Jesus suffered and died for you, all of your sins are washed off you and onto Him. He took them to the cross and suffered and died to remove them from you forever. The Spirit takes that plan of the Father fulfilled in the work of the Son and makes it yours. And He creates in you the supernatural power that is faith by which you have and hold all that Jesus did as being for you.

But the Holy Spirit isn't done working on you when the Rite of Baptism is complete. He is the God who remains with you and in you. **Titus 3:4-5 <sup>4</sup> But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,** He continues that work of washing your sins to the cross of Christ and removing them from you forever. He continues this work because you and I continue to sin. He works in you through the Father's words of Scripture that show us the ways we sin against our Triune God. He convicts us that since we sin daily, and at times hourly, we can never know and confess them all. He moves us to confess that we are "by nature sinful and unclean". And because we are, He points us to Jesus, and His work of atonement applied to our lives daily through the Gospel given in the means of grace: the Word and Sacrament. He is the One who does this for us and in us. He is sent by the Father and the Son to do this work that we call repentance. In doing so He works to keep us in faith into life everlasting.

## Conclusion

What should all this mean for you and me? It means that our Triune God is beyond our comprehension. And that He works in ways that are beyond our understanding. As Jesus told Nicodemus He works like the wind, we can't see it with our eyes, but we can see and feel the work that it does. The Triune God works together to bring you to faith and keep you in faith because He loves you with a sacrificial and unconditional love that of itself is beyond our understanding. And we don't need to understand it. We just need to believe using His gift of faith given in baptism and maintained through the means of grace. And what is your part in it? What you are doing right now, availing yourself of the means of grace in Word and Sacrament worship. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you of the Father and the Son's plans and purposes for you during the week by reading and studying His word. And then be His means to work in those around you here in Worship and out there in the world. Amen.