

June 7, 2020 – Acts 2:22-36

When we talk about the Trinity, what comes to mind? Probably “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” That’s certainly what I think of. And when we use those terms, there’s a good chance you also think about the distinctive roles implied by those terms.

We think of God the Father primarily in terms of his work creating and sustaining the world. This is what we confess in the Small Catechism when we say, “I believe that God has made me and all creatures. He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them.” Good, solid theology.

We think of the Son primarily in terms of his work of dying for us and saving us from our sins. This is what we confess in the Small Catechism when we say, “I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil.” Good, solid theology.

We think of the Holy Spirit primarily in terms of his work in bringing us to faith through Word and Sacrament and keeping us in that faith. This is what we confess in the Small Catechism when we say, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.” Good, solid theology.

There’s certainly nothing wrong with thinking in this way. It’s both biblical and true. It is good, solid theology.

However, that is not a complete understanding of the Trinity. Because that entirely misses one essential, defining component: the Trinity is also one God. And the Bible emphasizes what the three persons of the Trinity do together as the one true God just as much as it emphasizes what the persons of the Trinity do individually.

This is the perspective that Peter has in mind in our Second Reading today. Last week, the Festival of Pentecost, we heard the beginning of Peter’s sermon to the crowd who gathered in amazement around the Spirit-filled apostles. Today, we hear the end of that sermon.

And Peter’s Pentecost sermon is perhaps surprising and ironic in that, even though these men are filled with the Holy Spirit, his sermon isn’t really about the Holy Spirit at all. It’s about Jesus. So, perhaps, that makes it a perfect text for this First Sunday after Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, because in preaching about Jesus, Peter shows us how God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work together to bring about our salvation.

Our text begins with Peter emphasizing the absolutely foundational fact that God raised Jesus from the dead. And Peter really doesn’t spend much time arguing this point. Maybe because that’s not necessary.

This is only 50 days after the resurrection. And Jesus has spent 40 of those days appearing to more than 500 people, Peter included. The Jewish authorities may be arguing that the resurrection was a hoax. But for the average Jewish man or woman on the streets, I imagine there was plenty of buzz about this prophet who came back to life. And about all the witnesses who can confirm that this was true.

Then again, maybe Peter didn’t need to argue about the resurrection. Maybe we spend a little too much time trying to rationally convince people of this point. Jesus once said, “*If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.*” In other words, a man without faith will never be convinced of the resurrection.

So Peter's point is not to argue the fact of the resurrection, but to explain its significance. Why does it matter that Jesus rose from the dead? You killed him, but God raised him up. Why?

Well, for that, Peter cites a source that every single person there would have known: the Psalms. The Psalms were the hymnal of Israel. Think about how much of the Divine Service you can recite from memory. How many hymns you can sing without ever looking at the words. That's what the Book of Psalms was for those people in Jerusalem. Even if they didn't know any other part of the Scriptures, they knew the Psalms.

And Peter blows their minds. Because he says, "These Psalms aren't just songs you sing on the Sabbath, as you gather around the dinner table, or as you travel to Jerusalem. These Psalms are prophecy. They are a prophecy of Jesus."

As proof, he starts with Psalm 16. David proclaims his confidence that his Lord and Messiah was always beside him. Therefore, his faith would not be shaken by all the hardships that he was encountering in life. It sounds at first glance like David is simply praising God in a fairly typical way.

But then Peter tells them to look closer. David doesn't just tell them that he's confident God will be with him in life. David says that he's confident that he won't die. That his flesh won't rot in a grave.

Except that David did die. David is currently rotting in a grave. And his tomb is 6 miles south of Jerusalem in Bethlehem. Most of Peter's audience had probably seen it at some point in their lives. So how could God possibly say that David wouldn't be abandoned to the grave? That his flesh wouldn't see corruption?

Unless, the Psalm isn't talking about David at all. It's talking about Jesus. It's saying that Jesus kept the will of his Father always before him. That he was never shaken in his task of dying on the cross.

And that he died knowing that he wasn't going to stay in the grave. That he whom terrified demons declared the "the Holy One of God" wouldn't stay in the tomb long enough to see the corruption of death. But instead, he would walk the paths of life. And ascend back into his Father's presence.

And he did all this so that now we can sing this Psalm for ourselves, not as a trite song of praise, but with hope and confidence. For we have been joined with Jesus by being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And he is with us always until the end of the age.

And we are not shaken, even by death. For, like Jesus, we will not be abandoned to the grave or the corruption of decay. We know the path of life. And we live in gladness in God's presence.

David wasn't just a king. He wasn't just a song writer. He was a prophet. And that wasn't the only prophecy that David had received. He had also been promised that one of his descendants would sit on his throne forever. So who better to speak about the resurrection than Jesus' own ancestor.

And now, Peter says, this Jesus has ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. David didn't ascend into heaven. David didn't sit at the right of the Lord. No, he wrote that his Lord would do just that. He wrote that Jesus would ascend to his Father's side. Until that day when he comes again to make all God's enemies a footstool.

Peter's sermon showed the people of his day what Pentecost meant for them. Peter's sermon showed them how the Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – was working together for their salvation.

That the Son was sent by the Father to die and rise again for their resurrection. For their eternal life. For their salvation. Even though it was they who had put him to death. And now, he had poured out the Holy Spirit on these apostles to reveal that same path of life to the whole city of Jerusalem.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work for their salvation. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit working for our salvation. Allowing us to remain secure and unshaken, even in the midst of hardship. Allows us to dwell in hope with glad hearts, even in the face of death.

For if God didn't not abandon Jesus to the grave, he will not abandon us either. If God forgave even those who nailed Jesus to the cross, he forgives us too. And if God sent his Holy Spirit to enable those disciples on Pentecost morning to speak good news to all the world, he will send his Holy Spirit to us as well.

In the waters of Baptism; in bread and wine, body and blood; in the Word of God shared and proclaimed this day... God the Father is working for your salvation. God the Son is working for your salvation. God the Holy Spirit is working for your salvation. Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity. Let us give glory to him because he has shown mercy to us. Amen.