

Trinity Te Deum

The official newsletter for Trinity Lutheran Church

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Sunday School and Bible Study 9:15 AM – Divine Service 10:30 AM

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Day 166

Do you like those shows that open with stating a day and a number? That right there creates dramatic tension and curiosity. If it's Day 1 there is more to follow and there is reason to be counting. If it's Day 8 what happened the first seven days? Today, December 1, is Day 166 of our leaving the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. We all know what happened on Days 1-165, but we don't know what is going to happen on Day 167 and following. The Lord does.

To date, the Elders have individually been reading a book about the various Lutheran groups; there are more than 50 of them in the United States. The book is dated, 1995, but it still seems relevant. I have spoken with a pastor who left in 2011. His congregation has yet to join anywhere. I have been contacted by three other Lutheran groups, but have not taken any meetings because I don't think the congregation is at that stage and I know I'm not.

I don't know what is going to happen on Day 167 but I can flesh out some of the issues facing us. One is the horns of discretion and folly. Luther's friend Spalatin was urging him to moderation. Luther replied, "Too much folly is displeasing to men...but too much discretion is displeasing to God" (d'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, 180). Too much discretion kept me in a synod that I knew wasn't faithfully disciplining anyone, especially congregations. Now I think it is wise to be vigilant for too much folly. Because as we know, when you come from one extreme you're almost always heading for the other.

Another thing to be on the lookout for is the adage 'strewn sparks die out.' A 19th century German Lutheran says that in the early days of Reformation, "the evangelical believers existed as 'sparsi' [i.e. those strewn among the multitude]. They were still not bound by any sort of external unity, whereas on the Roman side one could point to the one head and the episcopal organization. [For

Confessional Lutherans it was] only from pure teaching and the correct administration of the Sacraments could one recognize where the Gospel had dominance" (*Closed Communion*, 119). A synodical structure did not "light" our fire, but it was intended to help it stay lit by encouraging us to faithfulness. When it ceased to do that and instead tolerated all sorts of open errors thereby discouraging us, spritzing water on our dimly burning wick, it was time to leave. But from this we don't want to leap to the error that all fellowships are wrong. We don't want to be a lone ember in a dark, dying world.

A bit of humor will help illustrate that we want to avoid swinging from pillar to post: In a congregation influenced by Karlstad, a pastor who believed Luther wasn't progressing against the abuses of Rome quick enough, and so had encouraged the people to smash images, Luther had this interchange: "A cobbler said, "I have often removed my hat in front of an image on the wall or along my way, and that is idolatry, an insult to God, and does great harm to a poor human being, and that is why one should not have images.' Martin spoke, 'Then you must also, because of abuse, kill all the women and dump all the wine.'" The congregation then read Deut. 4: 15-18 [¹⁵"So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, ¹⁶lest you act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, ¹⁷the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, ¹⁸the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth."'] saying that proves that you are not to have graven images. "Luther picked up the passage and said that it was also written there that one should not pray to sun, moon, and stars (Deut.

4:19). Should one therefore remove sun, moon, and stars" (*On Ministerial Office*, 70, 71).

In the end, the idol I believed needed smashing was the Synod itself or rather the confession that our Synod is beloved by God and men alike. The principle I acted on is described this way by C. S. Lewis: "...every preference of a small good to a great, or a partial good to a total good, involves the loss of the small or partial good for which the sacrifice was made." (*God in the Dock*, 280, 281). "Our Beloved Synod" was the 'great good' the 'total good' that all matters of doctrine and practice gave way to. Synodical presidents, district presidents, pastors, and congregations never acted, never disciplined, never even studied things like Women in Combat, Order of Creation, and LGBTQ issues lest the unity of "our beloved Synod" be destroyed or even compromised. Given the choice between truth and unity, they picked the latter and sacrificed the former.

So did we, till Day 1. Now Day 166 is slowly materializing into Day 167. Depending on the movie, this progression can bring expectation, anticipation, joy. We're in that kind of movie.

Fences

A Nine Part Sermon Series on the Ten Commandments
Advent 2019 – Lent 2020

This is the beginning of our sixth trek through the Six Chief Parts of Luther's Small Catechism. We go through all six every four years. We do this every Advent and Lent in keeping with a 16th century Lutheran practice of having midweek services devoted to catechetical teaching.

We used the theme of "Fences" in our Vacation Catechetical School. Fences form boundaries; they warn; they prohibit, and they can comfort. If you have ever been lost how relieved you were when you finally got to a fence. Amusement park rides are fun precisely because you are "fenced in" so you can't fall out. So the Law, like the hymn says, is "good and wise", but it's chief function is that of a mirror: to show us our sins. "But" as another hymn has it, "'tis the Gospel must reveal where lies our strength to do His will."

All services are on a Wednesday. They start at 7:30 PM. With the exception of Ash Wednesday, you can be out the door at 8:15.

December 4 The Big Fence
The 1st Commandment

December 11 Fences with Signs
The 2nd Commandment

December 18 The Fence that Keeps In
The 3rd Commandment

Ash Wednesday What's a Fence Doing Here?
The 4th Commandment

March 4 A Fence Everyone Knows
The 5th Commandment

March 11 A Fence People Want Moved
The 6th Commandment

March 18 A Fence for Sea Gulls
The 7th Commandment

March 25 A Fence People Ignore
The 8th Commandment

April 1 Twin Fences That Stop All
The 9th & 10th Commandments

Advent Vespers Begin Wednesday, November 29, 7:30 PM

Advent as a season of preparation for the Nativity originated in France. Its observance was general by the time of the second Council of Tours, 567. In some places six or seven Sundays were included. When Rome adopted Advent, she limited the period to four Sundays as we now have. It was probably not until the 13th century that Advent was universally recognized as the beginning of the Church Year which up until that time had begun with the Festival of the Annunciation, March 25, or in some places at Christmas. While Advent never attained the extreme penitential character of Lent, it has always been regarded as a season of repentance and of solemn anticipation and preparation for the coming of Christ. [Adapted from Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy*, 465-466.] Three comings of Christ are remembered in Advent: the first coming, the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity in the womb of the Virgin Mary; the Second Coming of Jesus at the end of the world to judge it; and His continual coming among us in Baptism, the Word, and Holy Communion. The Advent wreath is of relatively recent origin, the 19th century. Only

two candles have historically represented something specific, the pink one and the white one. Lit on the Third Sunday the pink one stands for joy. On this Sunday, the penitential theme is supposed to be lighter. Tinged with the white of the Christ candle, the purple of penitence shades to the pink of a joyous rose.

Time For Me

The sainted Professor Marquart marched in Pro-Life rallies from day one. He said, "One place that ought to have the presence of a clerical collar is a Pro-Life rally." He also simply quoted Proverbs 31:8-9, "'Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.'" Then he said, "If this doesn't apply to the unborn, then it can hardly apply to anyone else." So this year, I'm going. You're invited. Here is the article from the Rally for Life organizers. Pastor Harris

2020 Texas Rally for Life

The 2020 Texas Rally for Life will be held on Saturday, January 25, 2020. The Texas Rally for Life will commemorate the 47th anniversary of the tragic Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision in 1973, which made abortion legal throughout all nine months of pregnancy. In the wake of Roe, legal abortion in our nation has claimed the lives of more than 60 million unborn children and has hurt countless women and men.

Schedule

1:00 PM – Meet at 14th and San Jacinto to march to the Capitol

2:00 – 3:00 PM Rally on South Steps of Capitol

3:00-4:00 PM – Ministry Fair on Great Walk of Capitol Grounds

About

Join thousands of Texans at the Texas Rally for Life on Saturday, January 25, at the Capitol in Austin. Show the media and our elected officials that Texas is PRO-LIFE! The 2020 Texas Rally for Life will commemorate the 47th anniversary of the tragic Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision in 1973, which made abortion legal throughout all nine months of pregnancy. In the wake of Roe, legal

abortion in our nation has claimed the lives of more than 60 million unborn children and has hurt countless women and men.

The Rally will feature pro-life speakers and leaders from across the state.

Plan to attend. Organize a bus or carpool of people from your church, youth group, or local pro-life organization to come. Individual signs will be provided, but bring a banner from your church, youth group, or pro-life organization.

For the full scoop on the rally, bus options from across the state, the rally host committee and more, visit our dedicated Texas Rally for Life page.

Meet Up with Others from Trinity

A signup sheet will be posted for those who want to meet up and walk together. We will meet at 12:45pm at the southeast corner of 14th and San Jacinto between the two parking garages that are east of San Jacinto. Those garages are both available for parking and are free on weekends. Get there early to find a good spot!

Why Closed Communion?

Is It Closed or Close?

The first question you might have is, "Why closed Communion?" Many, particularly in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have heard it called "close Communion." It was explained to them along the lines of a **close** family meal. That is nice sounding, but it has nothing to do with the idea of not letting some people commune at your altar. This practice comes from the early Church. There the deacon would declare that all those not in fellowship with their altar should leave. Then he **closed** the door. For more on why the term is properly **closed** and not **close**, see the footnote.¹

A Historic Practice that Still Goes on Today

In the first four centuries of the Church, the rule was this. If you believed it really was the Body and Blood of Christ on your altar, you practiced closed Communion. If you did not believe it was the Body and Blood of Christ really, actually present on your altar, you practiced open Communion, that is, you let people

decide for themselves whether or not they should take Communion. An analogy to these practices in life today is found at your pharmacy. The pharmacist keeps under lock and key certain medicines. You cannot have them unless you have a prescription. That is because those medicines are the real deal. If you take them wrongly, if you take them when they are not meant for you, they can harm you or even kill you. Doesn't St. Paul say the same thing about misusing the Holy Communion? "*For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick and a number of you have fallen asleep*" (I Corinthians 11:29-30). A faithful pharmacist keeps his or her real, powerful medicine under lock and key and doesn't distribute it to everyone who wants it. What about sugar pills? Who cares who takes a sugar pill? It can't do anyone any harm, and who knows, it might do them some good. If you don't believe the Body and Blood of Christ are really in Holy Communion, if the living Lord Jesus doesn't come into contact with anyone, why should you care who takes Communion? But if you believe it's really the Lord Jesus Christ present under the forms of Bread and Wine, that's another matter, isn't it?

But Shouldn't it Be up To Me to Decide if I go to Communion?

"Ah," some of you who know your Bible are saying, "He didn't quote verse 28, the one right before St. Paul's warning about communing wrongly. Verse 28 says, "*A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.*" Yup, that's what it indeed says, but St. Paul wasn't talking about the Methodists visiting the Lutherans, or the Presbyterians, Catholics, or Episcopalians visiting the Lutherans. He was writing to members of his own church, not visitors from different churches! I do say to my members what St. Paul said to his, "Let each of you examine yourselves, and so come to the Lord's Table." I don't say that to visitors and neither did St. Paul.

What Would Open Communion Say to Our Kids and Potential Members?

Say, for a minute, that I were to commune Catholics, Orthodox, or high Anglicans. Lutherans admit that these denominations also have the Real Presence. Or, say I were to commune those who are members of denominations who don't teach that Christ is really present on their altar in the Holy Communion though they themselves believe He is. What I would be saying is that visitors to my church don't need to be instructed in our faith before communing, but our children who have

grown up in this church do need to be instructed before communing. Wouldn't that be nonsense? What point would there be in making people go to instruction classes before joining our church? If I communed Catholics who pray to Mary, Baptist who don't baptize their babies, Presbyterians who believe Christ only died for some, how could I stop someone from joining our church who believed these things?

The Difference Between Fellowship and Friendship

There is one critical distinction you must make, the distinction between friendship and fellowship. Fellowship is not between individuals but altars. Fellowship is not between my heart and your heart but between your altar and my altar. Friendship is about your liking me and my liking you. Fellowship is about whether or not we believe, teach, and confess the same things.

We Take Your Confession of Faith Seriously

Since I can't look into your heart to see what you really believe, I can only go by the confession you make with your mouth. When you say, "I'm a Presbyterian," or, "I go to St. Mary's Catholic Church," you are making a confession of faith. Lutherans and Presbyterians, Lutherans and Catholics, Lutherans and whatever denomination, do not believe, teach, or confess the same things. We can't pretend we do. To go to the same altar together says one of two things: Either A) neither of us takes our confession seriously. Or B) we've agreed to disagree. If a person believes his or her doctrine is in agreement with the Word of God, does he or she ever have a right not to take it seriously or to agree to disagree? If you believe that your doctrine is in agreement with the Word of God, where does God give you permission to set it aside or to join it with a contrary teaching?

But What if I'm a Member of the ELCA, LCMS, WELS, or ELS?

"What about me? I'm a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. "The ELCA was formed when the Lutheran Church in America, the American Lutheran Church, and The American Evangelical Lutheran Church merged in 1988. By 1998 the ELCA entered into full fellowship with the Reformed Church in America, the United Church of Christ, and the Episcopal Church. These denominations have never wanted anything to do with the Body and Blood of Christ really being present on their altar. Furthermore, the ELCA as a church body publicly supports abortion, homosexuality,

and women pastors. If you don't believe me, just read their website. "What if I am member of one of the groups that split from the ELCA?" To my knowledge, the only doctrine they broke with is those involving the acceptance of homosexuality. They still aren't Pro-Life and they practice open Communion. If, however, you are in one of these groups as a weigh station between the ELCA and your final destination, we should talk, but it would be more than a 5 or 10 minute conversation before service. "So, I'm good if I belong to the LCMS, WELS, or ELS?" Not necessarily. If you believe Communion should be open to all Lutherans, all baptized, or all Christians, you don't belong at our altar. If you commune here, you are confessing you do believe in a Jesus who teaches closed Communion is correct doctrine and practice when you don't.

Because you won't commune me does that mean you think I'm going to hell?

Of course not. I don't commune some of my own children, and I don't think they are going to hell. I regard all who belong to the Holy Christian Church by faith in Jesus Christ as saved, forgiven, and part of the Body of Christ. When I don't commune you, I am saying one of two things. Either a) you have not been instructed in the Lutheran Faith or b) you belong to an altar that believes, teaches and confesses contrary to the faith believed, taught, and confessed at our altar.

Christian Men and Women Can Disagree Without Sending Each Other To Hell

I have found that those who take their confession of faith seriously do not want to commune at an altar that stands for something they don't believe in. If you are not sure what you believe, if you are not sure whether your conscience is being governed only by God's Word, then you should study these things. Compare what your church teaches with what the Bible says. Compare what we teach with what the Bible says. Join the one that agrees with what the Bible says.

Okay, so prove to me your practice of closed Communion is found in the Bible?

Good question. I could argue from the fact that when Jesus instituted this Meal He only invited those whom He had instructed during the previous 3 years. He didn't even invite His own mother! I could argue from Romans 16 where St. Paul lists those house churches with whom He is in fellowship. I could argue that the Bible commands Christians to separate from those who hold to teachings that are contrary to what the Bible teaches, and

St. Paul warned not about big doctrinal errors but the small ones, saying in I Corinthians 5:6, "*Don't you know a little yeast ferments the whole dough?*" Here are some other Bible passages for you to consider: Romans 16:17, "*I urge you fellow Christians to watch those who cause disagreements and make people fall by going against the teaching you learned. Turn away from them.*" II Thessalonians 3:15, "*If anyone will not listen to what we say in this letter, mark him, and don't have anything to do with him, so he will feel ashamed. Don't treat him like an enemy, but warn him like a brother.*" Titus 3:10-11, "*A man who chooses to be different in his teachings warn once, and a second time, and then don't have anything more to do with him because you know such a man condemns himself.*" II John 9-11, "*Anyone who goes too far and doesn't stay with what Christ has taught doesn't have God. If you stay with what He taught, you have the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and doesn't teach this, don't take him into your home or greet him. If you greet him, you share the wicked things he does.*" Matthew 7:15, "*Beware of false prophets. They come to you dressed like sheep, but in their hearts they're greedy wolves.*" I John 4:1, "*Dear friends don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God. Many false prophets have gone out into the world.*"

Do You Want To Know More?

Instruction in what this independent, confessional, Lutheran church teaches usually begins in September and February each year. These classes meet from 12:15 to 1:45 PM on Sundays. The class takes about 15 weeks to complete. All with questions, a desire to know more, or who think they might like to join our fellowship are encouraged to attend.

¹ "The term 'close Communion' was put into our use this century [20th] by the *American Lutheran* [Nov. 1941, p. 16]; it came from Baptist sources, and is in danger of blurring the primary reference by slipping into lateral and anthropocentric ways of thinking. The muddle is evinced by the antonyms. 'Close' is capable of degrees; the Gospel is unfractionable." "Webster knows 'close Communion' as a usage peculiar to the Baptists [1979 ed]." "In the official documents of the Missouri 'close' does not appear." It first appears in early 20th century publications chiefly in response to the use of the term outside the Missouri Synod. "After 1911, it [close Communion] does appear to have lain fairly dormant until quite recently." In 1920 Piper's *Dogmatics* in Latin had 'closed Communion. The 1953 edition excised 'closed Communion.'" The first use in an official Synod document seems to be a 1967 Convention resolution where it appears in quotation marks. The Missouri Synod story of adopting 'close' has 3 parts. 1. Moving from German to English, showing a problem of language, not doctrine and practice. 2) Covering up the term "close" when *Lutheran Witness* became an official organ, i.e. English publication. The high-water mark of the use of closed Communion was Piper's use in Latin. Low-water mark came in the 1950's when the term was removed in the English translation. 3) The undesirable term "close" resurfaced again no longer as an English translation but as an English word favored by some because it accommodated lateral degrees and fractions and levels; defended by some who hold 'close' and 'closed' are a distinction without a difference. But one can't merely be close in the doctrine of justification or distinguishing Law and Gospel. "Apart from some Baptists and some in the LCMS the rest of the world [today] speaks of closed communion" (*Closed Communion*, Harrison, M. and Pless, J., eds., CPH, 2017, 79-80, fn. 13.).

O'Rourke calls for stripping tax-exempt status from churches, charities that oppose same-sex marriage

by Jordyn Pair

October 11, 2019, 9:05 am

Democratic presidential candidate Beto O'Rourke called for churches, charities, and colleges that oppose same-sex marriage to be stripped of their tax-exempt status during a CNN town hall on LGBT issues Thursday night.

When CNN's Don Lemon asked if "religious institutions like colleges, churches, charities" should "lose their tax exempt status if they oppose same-sex marriage," O'Rourke replied "yes" without hesitation.

"There can be no reward, no benefit, no tax break for anyone, or any institution, any organization in America that denies the full human rights and the full civil rights of every single one of us," he said. "So as president we're going to make that a priority and we are going to stop those who are infringing on the rights of our fellow Americans."

<https://www.disrn.com/2019/10/11/orourke-wants-to-remove-tax-exempt-status-from-churches-who-oppose-same-sex-marriage/>

The Theology of Jesus

by Rev. Todd Wilken
Winter, 2010

President Barak Obama and conservative talk show host Glenn Beck disagree on a lot of things. But they do agree on one thing: their god.

While running for the U.S. Senate, the then-Illinois Senator Obama told Cathleen Falsani of the Chicago Sun Times: "I'm rooted in the Christian tradition. I believe that there are many paths to the same place" ("Obama: I Have a Deep Faith" Chicago Sun Times, April 4, 2004) More recently, Glenn Beck told his audience at his 8/28 Restoring Honor rally in Washington D.C., "To restore America, to restore honor,

we've got to start at the beginning and look at the patterns, when people came together, of different faiths, in the spirit of God, and the first thing they did was prayed together."

Now, these two men might quibble over what particular faiths should be included, but Obama and Beck agree that people of different faiths really do believe in and worship the same god. How can this be? One is a social and political liberal; the other is a social and political conservative. One is a professed Christian; the other, a professed Mormon.

More important, why are so many Christians today satisfied with this kind of generic god? Why have many Christian churches imported this "god" into their Sunday morning preaching, teaching and worship?

The answer is simple: Christians have undersold the doctrine of the Trinity.

The earliest Christians were required to confess the doctrine of the Trinity against Heretical alternatives and pagan theologies. Christians today, when called to do the same, may not even know what the doctrine of the Trinity is.

How often (outside official statements of faith) do American evangelical churches speak about God in explicitly Trinitarian terms? Apparently, not enough. A survey of the lyrics of the top 25 contemporary Christian songs used by churches reporting to Christian Copyright Licensing International between February and August 2010 revealed a solitary reference to the Triune nature of God. There were numerous references to God, but only one to God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It should come as little surprise that 58% of Christians in America have a less-than-Trinitarian view of God. According to a series of recent surveys conducted by The Barna Group:

...most Christians do not believe that the Holy Spirit is a living force, either. Overall, 38% strongly agreed and 20% agreed somewhat that the Holy Spirit is "a symbol of God's power or presence but is not a living entity." Just one-third of Christians disagreed that the Holy Spirit is not a living force (9% disagreed somewhat, 25% disagreed strongly) while 9% were not sure. ("Most American Christians Do Not Believe that Satan or the Holy Spirit Exist," April 10, 2009, www.barna.org)

Another survey, conducted a year later, confirmed these results:

In total, 68% of Mosaic Christians [Christians under the age of 25] said they

believe that the third person of the trinity is just “a symbol of God’s power or presence, but is not a living entity.” This compares to 59% of Busters, 55% of Boomers, and 56% of Elders who believe the Holy Spirit is merely symbolic. (“How Different Generations View and Engage with Charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity,” March 29, 2010, www.barna.org)

In other words, roughly 60-70% of self-professed Christians in America do not believe that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity appears to be disappearing from the theology of pop-American Christianity. As a result, the god of pop-American Christianity is often indistinguishable from the generic god of Glenn Beck and President Obama.

Jesus, the Trinitarian

Have you ever wondered, if the doctrine of the Trinity is so important for understanding the true God, why didn’t Jesus begin His public ministry by revealing God’s triune nature? In fact, He did. Beginning with Jesus’ Baptism, the Trinity was in full evidence:

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:21-22)

The Father’s voice came from heaven as the Spirit descended bodily onto the Son. There already at the very beginning of his public ministry, the Holy Trinity is revealed. And, we should note that this revelation took place precisely as Jesus was anointed for the Cross, and where Jesus first publicly associated Himself with sinners. After His baptism and temptation, Jesus went to his childhood home of Nazareth, where the subject of his first sermon was the Trinity:

And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of

sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:16-20)

Anointed in His baptism by the Father, with the Spirit, Jesus told the Nazareth Jews, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” And, although they may have been unable to articulate it with all the philosophical precision we use today, those who heard and believed Jesus’ word that day grasped by faith the Triune God.

Jesus’ theology is thoroughly and blatantly Trinitarian. Throughout his ministry, Jesus could hardly open his mouth without mentioning the Father and the Spirit. The revelation of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is woven through everything Jesus says and does.

We need to start reading Jesus as the Trinitarian He is. We need to understand every reference to the Father and the Spirit as an unabashed expression and revelation of the holy Trinity. If we do, we will discover the doctrine of the Trinity literally everywhere in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Even at the moment of Jesus’ death, where His baptism and ministry were brought to completion with His sacrifice at the Cross, Jesus is all about the Trinity. “Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last.” (Luke 24:46) Now, if this were any other man speaking these last words, they could only mean, “God, receive my spirit as I die.” But when Jesus said, “Father, into your Hands I commit my Spirit,” He was again showing us the Triune God.

The Trinity’s Why

Philosophically, it is dangerous to assign God a *raison d’être*, a reason for being. However, if we can suspend our philosophical misgivings and ask, “What is God’s reason for being?” the answer is found there at the Cross, in the dying breath of Jesus.

The death of Jesus for sinners is what the Trinity is all about. The Cross is not the Trinity’s avocation, hobby or emergency plan. There isn’t a box hanging on the wall in heaven with a Cross in it, and a sign reading, “In case of sin, break glass.” The Cross is the Triune God’s overarching purpose from before the foundation of the world. If we could be so bold to say such a thing

about God, the Cross is why God is, and why He does what He does.

With His saving work complete, after His resurrection, Jesus revelation of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit became explicit and unmistakable. On the day of His resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples:

Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." (John 20:19-23)

Here, Jesus was not only revealing the Trinity, but He was also revealing the Trinity's ongoing work in the world through the Church: to deliver the saving work of Jesus through the forgiveness of sins. This ongoing work of the Trinity was reiterated by Jesus at His ascension, where He commanded the Church to baptize and teach in the name of the Trinity:

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, by 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 behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Just as Jesus' revelation of the true God began at His baptism, so the Church was going to continue that revelation in exactly the same way.

Contrary to what so many theology textbooks say, Christian theology is not what man says about God; Christian theology is what God says about Himself. This means that if we want to know who God is, we go to Jesus. The Apostle John writes, "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, He has made him known." (John 1:18) Jesus is God's final word. With His saving work complete, Jesus has said all there is to say about God; but the Church still has a lot to say about Jesus.

The Church Confesses Jesus' Theology

The Christian creeds (the Apostles', the Nicene and the Athanasian creeds) are primarily confessions of Jesus and His saving work. This is why all three ecumenical creeds devote so much space to the person and work of the Second Person of the Trinity. This is also why all three ecumenical creeds are Trinitarian. In confessing Christ in his saving work, the Triune God is necessarily confessed as well.

The Athanasian Creed does this best. In particular, this creed states that the confession of Christ is indispensable to the confession of the true God in the world. Furthermore, the Athanasian Creed clearly connects the confession of the Triune God to salvation. The Athanasian Creed presents the Trinity as the *sine qua non* of the confession of Christ, and therefore, the *sine qua non* of salvation. This is why the Athanasian Creed sounds politically incorrect to our postmodern ears: "We are compelled by the Christian truth to acknowledge..." and, "He, therefore, that will be saved is compelled thus to think of the Trinity." The Athanasian Creed also makes starkly exclusive statements:

Whoever will be saved shall, above all else, hold the catholic faith. Which faith, except everyone keeps whole and undefiled, without doubt he will perish eternally....and, This is the catholic faith which except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved.

Salvation is at stake. The Athanasian Creed's ancient Latin name, *Quicumque Vult*, is taken from the first sentence of the creed itself, *Quicumque vult salvus esse, ante omnia opus est, ut teneat catholicam fidem, that is, "Whoever will be saved shall, above all else, hold the catholic faith."* In the Athanasian Creed, the Church clearly states that you cannot have one without the other: to confess Christ is to confess the Triune God, and to confess the Triune God is to confess Christ. This means that if the Church fails to preach Christ crucified for sinners, it denies the true God.

A caller to Issues, Etc. once asked a guest, "When we get to heaven, and we see God, what are we going to see?" Many images come to mind: floating triangles, doves and shining clouds. My guest answered simply, "Jesus." After all, how is the Father known? Only through the Son. How is the Spirit given and received? Only through the Son. How is the Triune God revealed? Only through Jesus. Who is coming back in glory to raise the dead and judge the world? At the resurrection, who will you see standing at the foot of

your grave? When Jesus descends again in glory to judge the living and the dead, we will look upon the unshielded revelation of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the crucified, risen and glorified body of Jesus. That's it. Just as Jesus told Phillip, "Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father." (John 14:8) There's no "getting behind" Jesus to the Father and the Spirit — there is no need to do so. Jesus has revealed the Trinity in his baptism, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension.

Am I a Modalist? No. Am I saying that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one and the same? Not at all.

I am saying that the one Triune God —the coeternal and coequal persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit— is revealed in Jesus, and Jesus alone. Apart from Jesus we cannot know the true God. Jesus said,

I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also.

From now on you do know him and have seen him (John 14:6-7).

If a church fails to preach Christ and His saving work, it is not preaching the true God. And it works both ways, if a church no longer confesses the true God, it no longer confesses the true Christ. So what is at stake as pop-American Christianity slowly abandons the Trinity for a generic god? What is lost if the Trinity disappears from preaching, praying and singing? A church without the Trinity, is a church without Christ. A church without Christ is no longer the Church.

What's This About a Sabbatical?

This all started with me saying: a pastor I knew in Detroit retired. About a month and half later, he started another church in the inner city. He said, "If I knew all I needed was 30 days off in a row, I never would have retired." That's what started me thinking; then came a flyer from Eli Lilly about clergy sabbaticals.

In 2012 I asked the Elders who asked the Voters Assembly if I could apply for a sabbatical from the Eli Lilly Foundation which offered them to clergymen. In order to apply, the congregation had to agree to continue to pay my salary and benefits as well as pay for the replacement pastor. Eli Lilly would provide the money for me to do something. They said tell us what makes your heart sing. I said, "A deer in my rifle scope." I

didn't get the sabbatical. When the Elders found out, they said I should apply again. I said, "No, I took this as a one and done thing. I appreciated them giving me the opportunity to apply, but I wasn't going to apply again."

Some in the Voters and some in the Elders didn't want to let this go. They raised the matter of Trinity funding a sabbatical for me. I didn't say 'don't' because I didn't think the money would be raised. The issue of the sabbatical waxed and waned for years. It was made a priority again when the Voters tasked the Elders with coming up with exactly how much was needed. Then it was decided to publish that number and update how the funding was coming along.

What it seems some don't know is that the sabbatical I applied for and Trinity took on to fund is for three months. (Eli Lilly Foundation recommended no less than three months and no more than twelve.) The money you so generously gave is enough to cover pastoral care expenses and what I would need for the plans I had. But you're also committing to keep on supporting the ministry of Trinity in my absence. I have a pastor willing to do shut-in calls, hospital calls, and funerals. I will need to find several pastors to fill in on Sunday morning. Ideally, I wish I could find one, but that doesn't seem likely.

In talking with my wife and the Elders, I have come to the conclusion that at this stage in my ministry it is not practical to take 3 months off in a row. Having just become in an independent church it doesn't seem like a wise time for the congregation either. So, I propose this. For the next 4 years, you allow me to take 3 extra weeks off each year. These would most likely extend my post-Easter, October, and post-Christmas vacations to 2 weeks rather than 1. The sabbatical monies would pay for clergy fill-ins and about 1,000 dollars would be given to me for each of these two week vacations to do the things I proposed to Eli Lilly.

This is the first time anyone is hearing about this. I didn't run this by the Elders, but my plan arises partly from having discussed sabbatical issues with them. So, I will ask the Voters Assembly in the January meeting for their approval. Meantime, please talk among yourselves and to me if you like. I particularly want to be sure the people who funded this sabbatical idea do not think my plan is contrary to what they were giving their gifts for. The last thing I want to do is cause offense.

Trinity Lutheran Church

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DECEMBER 2019

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12:15 PM Adult Class	5:00 PM JR. CONFIRMATION		7:30 PM ADVENT VESPERS			
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
12:15 PM Adult Class	5:00 PM JR. CONFIRMATION		7:30 PM ADVENT VESPERS			
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
1 -6 PM BUS CAROLING	5:00 PM JR. CONFIRMATION		7:30 PM ADVENT VESPERS			
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
5:00 PM CHILDREN'S PAGEANT	NO CONFIRMATION	7:30 PM Christmas Eve Candlelight Service	10:00 AM Christmas Festival Service	PASTOR ON VACATION		
29	30	31				
NO Adult Class	NO CONFIRMATION	PASTOR ON VACATION December 26—January 2				

JANUARY 2020

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
			1	2	3	4
		VACATION UNTIL January 2				
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12:15 PM Adult Class 5 PM EPIPHANY DINNER	5:00 PM JR. CONFIRMATION	7:00 PM VOTERS ASSEMBLY	7:15 PM Bible Study			
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
HOLY INNOCENTS, MARTYRS 12:15 pm Adult Class	5:00 PM JR. CONFIRMATION		7:15 PM Bible Study			
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
12:15 pm Adult Class	5:00 PM JR. CONFIRMATION	6:30 PM Elders Meeting	7:15 PM Bible Study			1-4 PM TEXAS RALLY FOR LIFE- STATE CAPITOL
26	27	28	29	30	31	
12:15 PM Adult Class	5:00 PM JR. CONFIRMATION		7:15 PM Bible Study			