

Epworth Chapel on the Green
June 11, 2017
Trinity Sunday
The Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Genesis 1:26-2:3
Psalm 150
2 Corinthians 13:5-14
Matthew 28:16-20

In all human relationships, whether it is the relationship of a parent to a child, a husband and a wife, a brother to a sister, a friend to a friend, persons want to be known and loved in that relationship not just for what they *do*, but for who they *are*.

In a similar way, the God whom we worship deserves to be loved and worshiped not just for *what He has done*, as marvelous as that is. God deserves to be loved and worshiped because of *who He is*.

It is the holy Trinity that reveals and discloses to us God in His *nature* – *who God is*, and not merely what God has done.

The Christian faith is built upon mystery, and the Trinity is the chief mystery of the faith. All Christian doctrines flow from this *chief* mystery. The church's identity *flows* from it, and the church's mission and activity *embodies* it, as Jesus makes clear in today's Gospel lesson from Matthew. The very liturgy we are praying today is built upon this Trinitarian confession, and the many expressions of it are not theological "window dressing," but essential affirmations and recognitions of *who God is*, and who *we are*.

Because the Trinity is ultimately a revealed mystery, many take the approach of accepting it and then not giving it much thought. But a mystery is not something that should be avoided, but rather prayerfully *pondered*.

And what I'd like for us to ponder this morning as part of trying to worship God for *who God is*, is the revealed truth that *God is a Father*. And as a Father God is creating a *family*. God's purpose is not merely to save us *from* sin, damnation, and hell, as wonderful as that is. God's purpose is to save us *for divine sonship and daughtership*.

There are many images of the church in the New Testament, but perhaps the most compelling image there is of the church as the *Family of God*. We are created in God's very image (Genesis 1-2), and God's purpose is that we become His children, not just in a spiritual or metaphorical sense, but in a literal and real sense.

The theological term for this is "divine filiation." By that is meant that we become God's sons and daughters, not spiritually or metaphorically, but literally by *sharing in the life of the Trinity through the Holy Spirit*.

This theme comes to us in John's Gospel in the form of mutual indwelling. Jesus calls on his disciples to "abide" or remain in him, to dwell in him even as He dwells in the Father and the Father dwells in him. In John 17, Jesus prays that his

followers will so intimately share the love shared by the Father and the Son that the result will be that “they all may be one.”

In the Apostle Paul’s writings, this theme of sharing the life of the Trinity is found in Paul’s expression “in Christ.” In our baptism, we are buried and raised up with Christ, Paul says. The word for baptism that Paul uses means “to plunge or immerse.” Paul is saying that baptism immerses us into God’s divine life, like a fish in water.

And for further evidence of this theme, we can look to one of John Wesley’s favorite texts. It comes to us from the Apostle Peter, who writes to Christians in Asia Minor and says:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Peter 1:3-4)

The triune God is a *family*: Father, Son, and the interpersonal Love that perfectly binds them together, who is the Holy Spirit. You and I were created to become part of this family, not spiritually or metaphorically, but *literally*. We were created for divine sonship and daughtership . *We were created to share in the divine life of the Creator God.*

And how do we share in the divine life? How is it that we become partakers of the divine nature? Answer: Through the sacraments. Baptism gives us familial

birth into this new life, and the Eucharist feeds and nurtures and grows us up into it. Among other places, nowhere is this made clearer than Jesus' words in John's Gospel:

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day...Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. (John 6:54-57)

The Trinity is the chief mystery of our faith. It is a revealed mystery, and as such transcends the boundaries of human reason. But mystery though it may be, we are nonetheless called to ponder it, and more importantly, to participate in it and to share it. For the triune God we worship is a Father who is begetting children, a Father whose sons and daughters are not such in a *spiritual* sense, but in a *literal* sense. To Him be glory and praise forever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.