

"You Have Been Brought to a Very Good Place"

Confirmation & Trinity Sunday - 2010

Text: Romans 5:1-5

God grant you the grace to comprehend and appreciate ever more fully not only the gifts and blessings of our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but the absolutely incredible place to which each of you has been led and in which you now stand. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, and especially this morning our Confirmand:

Have you ever been in a really, really good place and then looked from there to see someone in a really, really *bad* place? Some of you, for example, know what it is like seeing the news reports of bitter cold, blizzard conditions on the Northern Plains when you are living in much warmer climes. ON the other hand, all of us here this morning can look around at the beautiful place in which we live and thank God that we are not living in some lawless, crime riddled or impoverished place elsewhere in the world. We are in a beautiful place, and that fact is only magnified by the existence of bad places.

Probably safe to say that everyone here this morning has had opportunity to think such thoughts. God has been very good to us. What about the opposite view? Anyone here recall being in a really *bad* place and longing to be somewhere else – or at least thankful that you were not a part of that place or that crowd.

As I've mentioned to a couple of you already, my wife and I recently attended my daughter Shannon's graduation ceremony at the University of Wisconsin in Eau Claire. For me it was an eye-opener where the fact that we are to be in the world but not of the world was brought home in particularly sharp fashion. While I am confident that at least a small minority of those in attendance were Christians, God was really not invited to the celebration. Man was the focus and human "wisdom" was the object of worship. The whole experience, in fact, left me with both a profound sense of sadness and an overwhelming sense of gratitude – sadness for those who know nothing else and gratitude for having been rescued from such shallow pointlessness. It is a critical reminder of just why we do what we do here at St. Paul and why our ongoing Christian education and doctrinal vigilance is so vital. In fact the experience helped to bring into sharper focus just how good we have it – how good the place is to which you and I have been brought.

This is what I want to share with you this morning. Today is Trinity Sunday. This is the Sunday of the Church year we set aside to study and reaffirm our understanding of, and belief in, the triune nature of our God - one God yet three Persons. This is also the Sunday of the Church Year that we set aside as Confirmation Sunday – the time when we celebrate the confirming of the Christian faith by our youth, together with our own recommitment to the vows we took in our youth. We turn now to our text for this morning, which will not only verify the triune nature of our God, but it will also demonstrate how *we have indeed, even now, been brought to that very good place.* Our text is found in Paul's Letter to the Romans, the Fifth Chapter:

Romans 5:1-5 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

So far the very words given to us by our Triune God. Reminding ourselves of the source of these words will surely make them all the more precious and worthy in our hearts and minds. That our God would bless us through the study of these his words, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us through Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"*** Amen.

Dear Friends and Servants of Jesus Christ, our contrast this morning is between good places and bad places. Our problem, for the most part, is that we often have trouble recognizing which is which. More to the point, we seem to have a difficult time acknowledging just how good we've got it, as well as the cost of maintenance.

What you and I ought to see whenever we find ourselves in a crowd of mostly unbelievers is a reminder of the turmoil, bitterness and pessimism that is the lot of every single human being who does not know Jesus Christ and the forgiveness that he has earned for us.

That is, admittedly, a very strong statement. Aren't there unbelievers – whether rank atheists or members of non-Christian religions – who are not bitter, who are not filled with turmoil and pessimism? Not

really. Not really. You know full well the distinctive character of Christianity – how it is different from every other religion in the world. Every other religion requires man to supply that which is needed to appease an angry God. I suppose it might be possible to exist in a non-Christian religion and feel a sense of peace, but I would maintain that that would be possible *only* if you are thoughtless, careless, or both.

In our hearts human beings know – *know* – that we have no power to mollify a righteous God, against whom we sin repeatedly every single day of our lives. Only a shallow, thoughtless, self-delusionary person could imagine that occasionally acting as he should could ever make up for the countless times he has not. Most such take comfort in "the curve"; that is, they fool themselves into believing that God accepts you and your conduct if there are others who are worse. That means, for example, that if I use bad language, God will overlook it because I don't, after all, use it around the kids – like some do. If I am less than honest, such sins are very forgivable if they are only white lies. The list is endless. Human beings can actually get to a place where we can see almost nothing but sin in our lives, but nonetheless feel good about ourselves because we can always find someone who is worse.

Martin Luther, like the Apostle Paul before him, had a sense of spiritual honesty that we desperately need to imitate. Though the conduct of both of these men was outwardly spotless and exemplary, they came to recognize the futility of pretending to be anything other than utterly unworthy and undeserving in the eyes of a holy God.

This is exactly what you and I need to learn to recognize when we see a secular crowd. We need to learn to see beyond the mask, veil, disguise and to recognize the terrible conflict that taints every relationship, every thought, every emotion. Try as we might human beings cannot, on our own, get to the bottom of such confusion and turmoil. To escape that very bad place we need very specialized, outside help. With that unique assistance that only God the Holy Spirit can provide, you now have been led to understand that the one thing that was causing such great turmoil in our lives was our relationship with our Creator God – or, more accurately, the *lack of* relationship. The Bible tells us that **"your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."** (Isaiah 59:2) Because of this alienation from our Creator God there was, and could be, no true peace in our lives. Always something deep within us recognized our need to be reconciled to God, and yet we were powerless to bring it about. We had become God's enemies, and because of this, nothing in our lives could be

complete or thoroughly good. There was always something missing – until we came to know our Savior.

This, dear Christians, is the good place to which you have been brought; this is the very good place in which you now stand. *This* is where we all wanted to be. We wanted to stand once again in God's good graces, in God's glorious, blissful presence. Our sins had caused God to **"hide his face from us."** Yet we longed to stand accepted in God's presence once again. We tried all sorts of things to accomplish this reconciliation on our own. We tried to make ourselves lovable to God by doing *whatever* we had convinced ourselves would please him. We tried to deny that anything was really wrong. We tried to make up a god who would accept us *"just as we are."* We tried it all, and in the end nothing worked. When we looked at ourselves and our lives honestly, we had to admit that we were not where we wanted to be, and by ourselves there was no way for us to get where we wanted to be. There was simply no way for us to return to the presence and good graces of our Holy God.

We couldn't do what needed to be done to get to that good place, so God did it for us. Jesus Christ is, of course, the outside source that provided entrance into that good place in which we now stand. He himself once said in John 10:9, **"I am the gate (door); whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture."** We wanted to stand in God's grace. Our text tells us that it is only through Jesus Christ that this can be done: **"We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace..."**

Oh to what a blissful place we have been led! Millions upon millions have died trying to gain entrance to this spot that we now occupy, only to know utter and eternal failure in the end. You and I have been told that there is only *one* door. What is more, we have been told exactly where that one door is to be found. Jesus created our access to God the Father. How has he done this? That which separated us from our God was our own sin. That was the obstacle that barred our entrance, the wall that prevented any and all contact with our Creator God. But now our text tells us that **"we have been justified through faith."** To be justified means to be declared "not guilty" by God. It means that our sins have been removed by God because he placed the punishment for those sins upon his own Son. Again our text says that it is **"through Jesus"** that **"we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand."** Access could not be

gained by trying to do good. We couldn't talk our way in, bribe our way in, charm our way in. The best news here is that Jesus hasn't just opened a small door for us, he tore down the wall. Sin was the barrier; Jesus removed it. Without Jesus Christ, heaven would be of no value whatsoever to us sinners. The most beautiful place on earth is pretty much useless if entrance is forbidden to human beings. So too heaven is of no value to us if we are denied entrance.

What exactly does this have to do with Trinity Sunday and Confirmation? Much in every way.

There are not many paths into the good place we now find ourselves. There is but one, very specific path. On this Trinity Sunday we celebrate the triune nature of our God because it is only our Triune God that bring us to this place. Every aspect of our God is critical. God the Father created and provides for us. God the Son saved us by paying our sin debt. Neither has value to us personally without the other. Without God the Father, we have no existence. Without Jesus Christ, we remain God's enemies and thus could never enter eternal paradise with the Father.

What of the Third Person of the Trinity? What of God the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is the One who alone can make this paradise our own personal possession. It is only through the Holy Spirit that we have been brought to saving faith. It is only through the Holy Spirit that we have been **"born again of water and of the Spirit."** Our text puts it this way: **"Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."** Heaven itself would be worthless to us if not for the Holy Spirit. No matter how hard we struggled, no matter how fervently we wished for heaven and to be living in the presence of God the Father, entrance would be denied us if not for the Holy Spirit. It is the *Holy Spirit* who brings us to saving faith in Jesus Christ. It is the *Holy Spirit* who keeps us in that faith. It is the *Holy Spirit* who thereby opened the door to heaven.

You can obviously see then just how destructive it is to downplay or to deny the triune nature of our God - or any Person of that triune God. Our God is of no comfort or value to us without all three persons. The Father created us and we long to live forever in his presence. The Son, Jesus Christ, is the one who has removed the great sin barrier and reconciled us to the Father. The Holy Spirit brings us to faith and preserves us in that best of all places.

Praise God that our full and complete Triune God has worked completely in you! That is why Paul in our text says **"we rejoice in the hope of the**

glory of God." "Hope" should be thought of as *"confident expectation."* With confidence we now look forward to Judgment Day, because we even now have eternal life within us. We even now are in that *good place*.

This represents the heart and soul not only of Trinity Sunday, but also of Confirmation Sunday. This is the reason it is so vitally important that we continue teaching these sacred truths to our young people. Entrance to this good place come through saving faith, and faith comes by hearing the Word of God. God has no grandchildren, only children. The gospel can be lost in one generation. We rejoice this morning that these truths have been taught to our Confirmand and that they represent the conviction of his heart. Of this conviction he will give testimony this morning. Yet as we hear his confession of faith and recognize with thanksgiving that he too stands in that good place – at peace with God through Jesus Christ - see in this Confirmand here today not the result of human effort but rather the working of our Triune God, for it is our God who has brought both him and you to the good place where both you and he now stand – holy and righteous in the sight of our God. May that same God continue to work powerfully in our midst. Amen.

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Trinity & Confirmation Sunday – May 30, 2010

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -#246- (Red Hymnal)

"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty"

The Order of Morning Service – Brown Hymnal page 12.

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Proverbs 8:22-31) On this day we celebrate both the triune nature of our God and the confirmation of the faith of our youth. We begin, therefore, with one of the many proofs found in the Old Testament concerning the triune nature of our God. We are to hear the words of this Proverb in the voice of Jesus himself, the 2nd Person of the Trinity.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 91 (Page 33)

The Gospel Lesson: (John 16:12-15) Our Gospel lesson is one of many, many sections where God is described as triune, though the word "triune" is nowhere to be found in the Bible. Still God in His Word makes it clear that there are three distinct persons, and yet only one God. Triune is the word we have developed to describe what is clearly taught by God in His Word.

The Confession of Faith – The Nicene Creed – Brown Hymnal page 5

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#784- (Brown Hymnal)

"Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me"

The Sermon – Text: Romans 5:1-5 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

"You Have Been Brought to a Very Good Place"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) – Brown Hymnal page 16 insert

The Confirmation Hymn -#333- (Red Hymnal)

"Blessed Savior, Who hast Taught Me"

The Rite of Confirmation – Michael Hansen

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn -#310- (Verses 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Thy Table I Approach"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution -Hymn #315- (Red Hymnal)

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -#785- (Brown Hymnal)

"Children of the Heavenly Father"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Last Sunday (50) 2010 Average (52)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:30 a.m.	– Fellowship meal
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor David Naumann has accepted the calls to Clarkston and Orofino. Pastor James Naumann was installed on Wednesday as the new pastor in Jamestown. Pastor Luke Bernthal is considering the calls to Valentine, Mission, and White River. Pastor Michael Gurath has been commissioned by Holy Cross Congregation of Phoenix to carry out mission work in East Africa for 6 to 13 months.

Trinity and Confirmation – Today we celebrate both the triune (3 in 1) nature of our God (Trinity Sunday) and the reaffirmation of our Christian faith – both on the part of the church's youth and by all previous confirmands. As we hear our Confirmand give witness of his faith this morning, it is good, right, and proper for all of us to recommit ourselves to the service of our Lord along with him.

Fellowship Meal – All are encouraged to remain for the fellowship meal following the service this morning – in honor of this year's Confirmand.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is asked to meet briefly prior to the fellowship meal this morning.

NKJ Proverbs 8:22-31 "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, Before His works of old. ²³ I have been established from everlasting, From the beginning, before there was ever an earth. ²⁴ When *there were* no depths I was brought forth, When *there were* no fountains abounding with water. ²⁵ Before the mountains were settled, Before the hills, I was brought forth; ²⁶ While as yet He had not made the earth or the fields, Or the primeval dust of the world. ²⁷ When He prepared the heavens, I *was* there, When He drew a circle on the face of the deep, ²⁸ When He established the clouds above, When He strengthened the fountains of the deep, ²⁹ When He assigned to the sea its limit, So that the waters would not transgress His command, When He marked out the foundations of the earth, ³⁰ Then I was beside Him *as* a master craftsman; And I was daily *His* delight, Rejoicing always before Him, ³¹ Rejoicing in His inhabited world, And my delight *was* with the sons of men.

NKJ John 16:12-15 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. ¹³ "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. ¹⁴ "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you. ¹⁵ "All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare *it* to you.

NKJ Romans 5:1-5 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³ And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.