

"The God We Know" **(Trinity Sunday – 2019)**

Text: John 8:48-59

May the love of God the Father fill you with wonder; may the sacrifice of God the Son fill you with thanksgiving; and may the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit fill you with comfort, faith, and hope – all gifts from our Triune God on this Trinity Sunday. Amen.

Fellow Christians: About six thousand years ago our God brought the universe into existence by the power of his Word. He said, and it was so. Do you understand how he did that or how exactly it came about? On that first day of earth's existence he created light, simply calling it into existence by declaring that it would be so, and it was. Do you believe in light; that is, do you believe that such a thing as light actually exists? Of course you do. Why? Because you can see it. You know it exists because the evidence is all around us. We see everything that we see because of the existence of light.

Next question – and here is where things begin to get interesting: Do you fully understand light? The answer is no, you really don't. Oh you can look it up online – as I did – and sort of begin to grasp some of the basic concepts, but you really don't fully understand it. Not even those who study it for a living pretend to know all there is to know about it. And yet you believe that it exists, despite the fact that you don't fully understand it, because you see – literally see – evidence all around you.

This is by no means unique in our existence. In fact the same thing applies to many other phenomena in our lives. Do you really fully understand electricity? Radiation? Gravity? Me neither. But we still believe that those things exist. How about wind? What is it exactly and how does it begin and end. More perplexing still, why does it seem to take such random paths? Though you may have no answers to these questions, as residents of North Dakota you obviously still believe that that wind nonetheless exists.

This morning we celebrate an aspect of our God that no one fully understands – his Triune Nature. Though it's easy enough to speak of three-in-one (three Persons and yet one God) once we start to get into the specifics (as we did this morning in our confession) we find ourselves in very deep waters indeed.

Yet we believe in the Triune nature of our God. Why? Because God said so, in his Word.

Our text for this morning represents just one of those "God said so" proofs of that which we believe, even though we don't fully understand it. That text is found in the Gospel of John, the 8th Chapter:

ESV (John 8:48-59) *The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?" 49 Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. 50 Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. 51 Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." 52 The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.' 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?" 54 Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' 55 But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." 57 So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" 58 Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." 59 So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.*

So far the Word of our God. What a rare and wonderful privilege to possess these words of timeless truth as our sure and constant guide. That our God would bless our study of these perfect words, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Isn't it just a pure joy to simply *worship* our God, to fall on our knees in humble awe before him and to unreservedly praise, honor and glorify him? This is a *good* thing. This is fitting, right, and utterly appropriate on absolutely any occasion – because he is worthy. So many things in life require careful balance. Not here. Here there need be no hesitancy, no reluctance, no apprehension, no measured restraint. Human beings simply cannot worship our God too much or too well.

Understand, however, that we don't worship our God because we fully grasp everything there is no know about him. We worship him, in part, because we don't. We fully acknowledge that he is infinitely far above us, so much more powerful, wise, and grand than anything we mortals could ever fully comprehend. In fact that's part of what makes God worthy of our worship – the very fact that we don't, and can't, grasp all there is to God.

But just here we see a growing and most troubling trend. There is a rising inclination in our society to reject the very existence of God simply because he cannot be explained scientifically or grasped intellectually. Man asks "*How can this be?*" and if the answer is not readily available, man dismisses the very concept of God. As man's understanding concerning how things work in God's incredible creation increases, man's tendency now is to worship the creation, or man's own limited understanding of that creation, rather than the Creator himself.

On the one hand, this is most puzzling. Who wants to worship that which is on a par with himself? Isn't worship supposed to be reserved for that which is greater, grander, and more sublime – in the case of our God, *infinitely* so? And yet on the other hand this tendency to dismiss and reject the very existence of God is anything but surprising, for this is the very essence of our foolish, fallen nature from the very moment of our conception. It is the delight of Satan, into whose control every single one of us is naturally born. Every human soul was born profoundly foolish and spiritually ignorant – a natural enemy of God. More than even that, we were born with an inordinate love of self. In fact it is relatively easy for man to reject God because man is so enamored with himself. It's only natural then that if God doesn't seem to measure up to our own natural beliefs, instincts, and understanding, then man will invariably dismiss God and opt to believe and honor self, and he will naturally do so every single time.

So it is that when the Bible communicates to us that God is one, and yet three separate and distinct persons, man's natural reaction is: "*That's impossible. It makes no rational sense.*" Natural man then dismisses it out of hand. Unable to grasp how such a thing can possibly be true, man naturally concludes that it is not.

This sort of skepticism extends throughout the doctrines of Scripture. The virgin birth can't be true – rejected. The resurrection from the dead can't be true – rejected. The miracles, the two natures of Christ, the

creation of all things from absolutely nothing by the power of God's Word alone – rejected, rejected, rejected.

This is exactly what Jesus pointed out in the verse that precedes our text, where he said to those Jews that refused to believe what he taught them, "***Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.***" ^{ESV}(John 8:47) To "**hear**" means more than to just comprehend what is being said. It means to believe. In fact it means to accept as true even if you do not fully grasp what is being said. In our text, for example, Jesus used Abraham as an example or object lesson. When God promised Abraham that he and Sarah would have a child in their old age, Abraham had absolutely no idea how such a thing could be possible, yet he believed (he accepted as true) what God had just promised. This is the sort of "hearing" that Jesus was referring to in verse 47 – not a rational or intellectual comprehension, but a childlike acceptance that if God says it, it must be true.

In fact *all* of the Christian faith must be "heard" in that way. Take a step back and examine the true Christian faith objectively. What about our faith "makes sense"? That's how we tend to judge things to be true or false in our day-to-day existence, isn't it? Even if it is something that we've never heard before, if it seems to "make sense," we allow ourselves to believe it. If it does not, we tend to reject it as false – unless and until further evidence is presented to convince us. But does it make sense that God would send his own Son to live a perfect life on earth and then, once he had lived that perfect life, to visit the sum total of the punishment for all of the sins of the human race upon that *one sinless man*? Can anyone be born without a human father? Does it really make sense that someone who has been dead for three days can suddenly be alive again? Does it make sense that individual human beings (those who *had* sinned and who *were* therefore *deserving* of punishment) are required to add or supply *nothing whatsoever* to what Jesus did before they can be forgiven and saved? How does it make sense that a debt that is owed by every human being *except One*, is made to be paid by none but that One? Does it make sense that the Word of God, applied to simple water, can create saving faith even in a newborn infant?

And yet as Christians we not only believe such things, we *celebrate* them. So also on this Trinity Sunday we celebrate what we really have no hope of fully grasping: the triune nature of our God. In our text, Jesus himself speaks sublime truth that defies our rational

comprehension. The Jews, who were, as always, operating on a strictly rational basis, not only condemned Jesus for what he was saying, they wanted to kill him for it. The statement that tipped them over the edge was this: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."**

Understand that the Jews heard and processed these words; they just didn't believe them to be true. In other words, they understood that with the **"I am,"** Jesus was claiming to be eternal. Since only God can be eternal, Jesus was therefore guilty of blasphemy. What they apparently dismissed out of hand was the other possible explanation: that Jesus was exactly who he said he was – the Son of God and Savior of the world. This is precisely what Jesus was talking about in verse 47 when he said, **"Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."** It was not that they couldn't understand what he was saying. They just rejected it as false.

This is how our present society treats the true Christian faith. What parts of "Christianity" are today accepted and tolerated? Not the truths that save, but the parts that "make sense" – and *only* the parts that make sense. Christians are permitted to feed, clothe, and shelter the poor, but we are absolutely condemned for teaching creation, the virgin birth, the resurrection, the divinity of Christ, and the inerrancy of the Bible. We can celebrate women, but we cannot deny any woman the right to choose to murder her unborn child. We can celebrate mothers and fathers, but we cannot teach that it is God alone who defines what it is that makes a father or mother good. We can proclaim "freedom," but we cannot condemn the conduct that God himself condemns. As with the Jews of his own day, we can "believe in" a Jesus that went around doing good, but we cannot proclaim Jesus as the eternal, omnipotent **"I am."**

Again, do we fully comprehend the Triune God that we worship? Not at all. In fact, we don't worship our God because we know or grasp him fully; we worship him in large part because we cannot. We freely admit that God is so far above us that there is infinitely more that we *don't* know about him than there is that we do. But you and I are obviously fine with that. That's why we worship him, our Triune God, and him alone.

Yet there is another reason, isn't there? We don't worship our God because we fully understand him; we worship him in large part because he fully understands us – and still did what he did. God knew all along that mankind would opt to kill its own Savior. Knowing that about us, God decided to go forward with his plan anyway. He sent his Son to be

killed by us, the very souls he came to save. He knew we would do it, but he also knew that there was no other way for us to avoid spending all eternity in unspeakable agony. He loved us with an impossible love, to the point that he sacrificed his dearest Treasure to spare us the punishment we so obviously deserved. This much we can and do know about our God.

Consider just how amazing this truth really is to you personally. God knows everything about you. He knows your terrible, revolting thoughts. He hears the Godless things that come out of your mouth and he sees the sin that you manage to hide, at least for the most part, from other human beings. He knows your doubts, your faithless fears and anxieties, and your perverse pleasure in the temporal shine and fluff of this world. All this he knows about you – knows you better than you know yourself – and still he loves you, still he cares about and for you, still he longs to have you with him for all eternity in heaven. That's why we worship him, isn't it? The world is filled with doubt and denial because of the demonstrations of his power. You and I are filled with faith and hope because of the demonstrations of his love. The world refuses to worship a God that it cannot fully comprehend. You and I need to introduce them to the God we have come to know, the God whose greatest attribute is his grace – his undeserved love for sinful, rebellious mankind. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Proverbs 8:22-31** "The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. ²³ Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. ²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. ²⁵ Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, ²⁶ before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world. ²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, ²⁸ when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, ²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, ³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, ³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the children of man.

^{ESV} **(Acts 2:22-36)** "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know-- ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. ²⁴ God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. ²⁵ For David says concerning him, "'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; ²⁶ therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. ²⁷ For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption. ²⁸ You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.' ²⁹ "Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰ Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, ³¹ he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. ³² This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. ³³ Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. ³⁴ For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, ³⁵ until I make your enemies your footstool.'" ³⁶ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

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Trinity Sunday – June 16, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 246 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

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

The First Lesson: (Proverbs 8:22-31) On this day we celebrate the triune nature of our God. We begin, therefore, with one of the many proofs found in the Old Testament that teach us that our God is One, but that this one God manifests himself in three Persons. Our first reading establishes both the deity and the eternal nature of Jesus, for we are to hear the words of this Proverb understanding that it is Jesus himself who is speaking. God grant us the grace to believe by faith what we cannot understand with our minds.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 45 (Page 32) *Read Responsively*

The Second Lesson: (Acts 2:22-36) Our second lesson is one of many, many sections also in the New Testament where God is described as triune, though the word "triune" is nowhere to be found in the Bible. God in His Word makes it clear that there are three distinct persons, and yet only one God. "Triune" and "Trinity" are words we have developed to describe what is clearly taught by God in His Word.

The Confession of Faith -

The Athanasian Creed (Bulletin Insert)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 746 (Brown Hymnal)

"Father, Most Holy, Merciful and Tender"

The Sermon – Text: John 8:48-59 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The God We Know"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post Sermon and Baptism Hymn – 252 (Red Hymnal)

"We All Believe in One True God"

The Baptism of Donovan Dennis Meyer

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 246 (Stanza 4) (Red Hymnal)

"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (34) Average (35)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee hour
	11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Tues-Thurs	-9:00 a.m.	– CLC GPC in Eau Claire
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Teacher Paul Tiefel is considering calls both to Holy Trinity of West Columbia and Faith of Markesan. Teacher graduate June Schmid has returned the call to St. John's of Okabena. That congregation has now called Teacher Matthew Kranz. Teacher Kyle Ochsner has announced his departure from the public teaching ministry at the end of the 2019-2020 school year. Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich have called Pastor David Reim.

CLC General Pastoral Conference – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to leave for the CLC General Pastoral Conference in Eau Claire this afternoon, returning Thursday.

Black Hills Camping Trip – This summer's Black Hills Family Bible Camp has been scheduled for Friday evening, July 19th, through Tuesday morning, July 23rd. For more information please call Pastor Aaron Ude at (605) 393-1311 or email him at aaronude@gmail.com.

Looking Ahead – This year's **Vacation Bible School** has been scheduled for August 5-9. Sessions will run from 6:30-8:30 each day. Our **Annual Church Picnic** has been scheduled for the following Sunday, August 11th. The site is Hillside Lion's Park, Shelter #1.

Congratulations! – Congratulations to Samuel and Karla Meyer, to whom a healthy baby boy was born this past week. Donovan Dennis Meyer is scheduled to be baptized during the service this morning. *"Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good!"*