

6 June 2004
The Festival of the Holy Trinity

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Drawn into the Life of God”

Text: Romans 5:1-5

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

What is religion? Is religion God getting involved in my life, or is it me getting involved in God’s life?

Popular religion – the kind of religion that you see on TV, hear on radio, and read about in most books from Christian bookstores in the mall – *starts* with our life. This is it – how can God make it better? How can God being involved in your life make your marriage better? Your family better? Your job better? You better? And so the focus is often on things that you can do to make God more involved in your life. To get God into “the corners” of your life. That your life can be fuller, and more meaningful, and more successful. And so many TV evangelists will tell you to pray and open your heart and your life to Jesus and invite Him in. Then things will get better. Let God get involved in your life.

But the Bible never talks that way! The things of God never start with us. As we heard in the reading from Proverbs, they *start* with God. And so Christianity is not about God getting involved in my life – it is about me getting involved in God’s life! It’s not about me opening my heart and my life and inviting Jesus in – it’s about God opening His heart and His life and bringing us into Him! God in His mercy draws us to Himself and into His life. It all starts and ends with Him. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending. (Rev. 21:6) In Him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:28) And if that is so, that our life is in Him, then who God is – the Holy Trinity – is a matter of great importance! . . . On the other hand, if religion is simply about making this life better, then who God is and which god you worship or believe in is really is irrelevant, as long as he (or she!) fits and fulfills your needs and wishes and desires. And is this not the attitude that we see in our world today? Religion, or spirituality, has become like a cafeteria. Pick and choose what’s best for you and your life.

But the truth is that God is not primarily interested in making your life *better* – He wants to make it *eternal*. And those are two vastly different things! For to make your life

eternal is to draw you into His life – for He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. (John 14:6) Therefore the things of this life and the things of God often clash, because they have different goals, and different means to reach those goals. A perfect example of that would be the reading from Romans that we heard earlier, which said: ***“we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.”*** If you are looking for God to make your life better, this verse makes no sense! But if God is drawing you into His life, then these words make perfect sense. For in these things God directs the eyes of our hearts and minds away from the things of this world, and focuses you on Him. Through suffering and endurance we learn to rely not on ourselves, but on Him. And hope looks not at the here and now, but to the end. To the goal. And knows that whatever we are experiencing now is part of a much bigger picture. . . . These words from Romans are words of faith and trust. These are words which know that God is working in my life – not to fix *this* life – but to give me another life, true life, eternal life.

And that’s what this day, the Festival of the Holy Trinity, is all about. Today we do not commemorate just a teaching or a doctrine, but life. The life of God, the Holy Trinity, and His life that He gives to us by drawing us into Himself. And so the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is not unimportant or optional, as some would have us believe. That it is simply enough to believe in “god” without defining who that “god” is. No, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity is a matter of life and death, just as we will confess in the Athanasian Creed in just a few moments: *“This is the catholic (or universal) faith which, except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved.”*

And so to save us, to give us life, God has not only revealed Himself to us and told us who He is – the Holy Trinity; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; three in one and one in three – He has, in fact, opened His heart and His life to us. No mere friendship does God desire. No “call me when you need me” kind of relationship. God wants much more than that with you. He wants to draw you into the love and life and unity that He has and that He is. . . . And this He does in the most unlikely place. Showing His love in the midst of hatred; giving life in the midst of death; united in purpose, even as the Father forsakes His Son. It is on the cross that we see God united with us that we might be united with Him. He takes our death to give us His life. He takes our sin to give us His forgiveness. He takes our kingdom to give us His kingdom. **The cross shows us the love of the Father sacrificing up His Son by the power of the Holy Spirit for the life of the world.** To give life to the likes of you and me.

And so as the Father sent the Son to earn this life for us, so now as we remembered last week, the Son has sent the Spirit to give this life to us. One God, three persons, united in purpose and work. And so from the cross where the Father was offering up His Son,

when our Saviour cried out that all things were now finished, the Holy Spirit also rushed forth into the world; rushing forth in the water and the blood from the side of Jesus. The blood and water through which the Spirit unites us to Christ, who unites us to the Father. And so we are baptized into Christ and live in Him; and in Holy Communion we eat and drink the body and blood of Christ and He lives in us. And through the Word of God which gives us the faith to believe this and makes it so, we are united to Him. We are not just friends, buddies, comrades, or co-pilots. We are now sons of God. Sons of God in Christ Jesus.

And so to believe and confess the Holy Trinity is much more than celebrating the Sunday of the Holy Trinity each year and speaking the Athanasian Creed. It is to know, each and every day, that apart from this Holy Trinity, we have no life. Oh, we may live 70, 80, or 90 years, but what of it? And perhaps we may not even live that long. A stray bullet, a drunk driver, or powder in an envelope in the mail may see to that. . . . Many people today are living, but many do not have life. People are marrying, working, buying lots of things, bigger houses, bigger cars. But if these are your life then you have no life. An earthquake or fire, an economic downturn, or an unexpected accident may see to that.

But the life of God is different. It is life that death cannot end. It is life that has risen from the dead and ascended into Heaven. It is life that lives for others and not for self because it has already been given all things. It is a new life. And it is the life that has been given to you. A life of peace in the midst of suffering; of joy in the midst of trouble; of hope in the midst of confusion. It is life that is content with much or with little. It is life that loves and serves. It is life that lives by faith, knowing that our life is not here, but that our life is hidden with Christ in God. (Col 3:3)

This life knows not only who God is, but what He has done for us. For in fact the two cannot be separated. And that's what it means to celebrate the Holy Trinity. Which, by the way, we do – not just once a year, but every Sunday, and every day. The Holy Trinity permeates our worship, and our lives. The Divine Service begins and ends in the triune name. Luther said to begin and end each day the same. For in His mercy, this triune God teaches us, washes us, feeds us, watches over us, and is with us always. In love, He has drawn us into His life.

This is true religion. This is the one, holy, Christian, catholic, and apostolic faith. And so we confess with the Church of all time: *Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity; let us give glory to Him because **He has shown His mercy to us.*** (Introit Antiphon for Holy Trinity)

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.