

THE TRINITY IS FOR YOU

Acts 2:14a, 22-41

The Holy Trinity (Series B)

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Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The text for the sermon comes from *The Acts of the Apostles*, chapter 2, verse 14a and verses 22 through 41.

It's a continuation of last week's reading. Last week, for the Day of Pentecost, we read verses 1 through 21. I'll review just a little bit before we hear the text for today. This event occurred exactly seven weeks to the day after Jesus' resurrection. And it's just ten days after Jesus' ascension into heaven. There were about 120 Christians at this point, and they were all gathered together in Jerusalem (1:15; 2:1) when the Holy Spirit came upon them and enabled them to speak in other tongues. There were also travelers dwelling in Jerusalem at the time, Jews from foreign nations who had come back to Jerusalem for the feasts of Passover and Pentecost. And they heard the miracle of these Christians speaking the gospel in their native tongues. That is, instead of speaking in Aramaic, which all the Jews spoke, they spoke in whatever languages they spoke in all these foreign nations. This miracle of tongues, then, was an indication that God was bringing salvation to the nations. It has always been God's plan to save the nations. But this is the point in history, after the death and resurrection of Jesus, that the Holy Spirit comes upon the Church and disperses us into all the world to testify of Jesus Christ. Pentecost began this great harvest of souls.

This miracle of tongues got everyone's attention, so then the Apostle Peter stood up and preached a sermon. He started with a quotation from the prophet Joel, showing that this powerful manifestation of the Spirit was proof that God was now pouring out his Spirit on all flesh. And the quotation from Joel ends with God's gracious invitation, "It shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (2:21). And that brings us to the part we will consider today, where Peter identifies who this Lord is that we can call upon for salvation.

Please stand as you are able for the reading of God's Holy Word. From Acts 2, we will start at verse 14, just to see who is speaking, and then we will continue at verse 22. We read in Jesus' Name.

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them:

²² "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.

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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.”

³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

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

Salvation is in Jesus Christ. Remember, in verse 21, Peter quotes the prophet Joel, saying, “Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Joel 2:32). Then Peter immediately declares everything about Jesus. The Name of the Lord, by which we are saved, is the Name of Jesus. So we should notice and pay attention to everything Peter now says about Jesus.

First, Jesus is a man, but more than a mere man. He is “Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs” (2:22). Even before Jesus’ death and resurrection, people had a pretty good idea who he really is. It was no secret in Israel that Jesus had performed marvelous miracles. From the miracles themselves, people might not necessarily conclude that Jesus is the Son of God, but they at least know that he is a prophet sent from God. In the Gospel lesson we read about Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night (John 3:1-17). He was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews. That is, he was from the group that ultimately demanded Jesus’ crucifixion. But when Nicodemus came to Jesus that night, he said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). Notice that Nicodemus did not say, “I know that you are a teacher come from God,” but he said, “We know.” That is, all of the Pharisees know this, even if they were unwilling to

admit it. We've all been there before, when we know something is true, but we're just not willing to admit it. And sometimes there's a moment when a friend can say to us, "You know it's true." And sometimes that's enough to make us admit it, because we already know the thing, but now we know that someone else knows that we know.

So Peter basically says about Jesus, *You know that Jesus came from God.* And if Jesus truly did come from God, he cannot be merely a prophet, but the Son of God, because he claimed to be the Son of God, and if a prophet lies about that, he's not really a prophet. So the miracles, along with Jesus teaching, prove that he is the Son of God.

Verse 23 shows both sides of a mystery. Peter says that Jesus was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God," but Jesus was also, "Crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." You might wonder sometime, *If it was God's plan all along for Jesus to be crucified, then can we really blame the Jews for demanding his crucifixion?* First of all, it wasn't *all* the Jews that demanded his crucifixion, but the Sanhedrin. That is, the ruling council. Second, two things can be true at the same time. It was the plan of God, *and* the men who demanded Jesus' death can still be guilty. This has to do with the foreknowledge of God. He knew how the Sanhedrin would respond to Jesus. Just like with Judas, who betrayed Jesus, God did not cause them to sin, but he knew that they would, and he used their sin to bring about the greatest good. We really see the power of God's sovereign rule when he allows sinful men to sin, but he accomplishes his will in spite of their resistance. This should be an incredible comfort to us. Because we sin. We resist God's will. But God does not withdraw his plan of grace. The weight of our sin can never exceed the weight of Jesus' atonement. His forgiveness is always more powerful, and God sends his Holy Spirit to draw us to repentance and back to his forgiveness. Even those men who demanded Jesus' crucifixion, the Holy Spirit called them to repentance and forgiveness.

Then God raised Jesus from the dead. Peter says, "Because it was not possible for him to be held by it" (2:24). Why not? First of all, because Jesus is God. He had authority to lay his life down, and he had authority to take it up again (John 10:18). And, also, because Jesus made atonement for sin. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23a). Death is the consequence and just punishment for sin. But when sin is removed, death cannot hold us. So it was the natural consequence of the atonement that Jesus would rise again from the dead. And that's not just the natural consequence for Jesus, but it is also the natural consequence for you and me. Since Jesus has made atonement for your sins, death does not have the authority to hold you or any of God's believing children. The only difference between Jesus' resurrection and ours is time. He was raised on the third day. For the rest of us, if we do not remain alive until his coming, we will be raised on the Last Day. But Jesus was raised on the third day to rule over all things until his Second Coming and to prove to us that our sins are forgiven and we will be raised like him.

Peter shows that Christ's resurrection was prophesied in the Old Testament. There are a few passages he might go to, but he chose Psalm 16. It's a Psalm of David, where he speaks of the hope of eternal life. The key verse is, "For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption" (2:27; Ps. 16:10). Who is David talking about? Peter makes the point that David can't be talking about himself, at least not completely, because he died and was buried. The Hebrew word that's used in Psalm 16 is *Sheol*. *Hades* is the Greek word for the underworld, what we would commonly think of as hell. The Hebrew word *Sheol* can refer to the underworld, or it can simply refer to the grave. And that's more of the meaning, both in Psalm 16 and as Peter quotes it here. David died a thousand years before Peter preached this sermon. He was buried, and his body decomposed. It saw corruption. Like the rest of us, he needs someone

else to raise him. But David foresaw the Christ, who is often called “the Son of David.” That’s who David is talking about. Peter says, “He foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption” (2:31). And because of this, David could also say concerning himself, and we can say this concerning ourselves, “You will not abandon my soul to Hades.” Even though we die and return to the ground, God does not abandon us there. But through Christ, who has been raised, God will also raise us.

The proof of this is Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. And Peter declares, “Of that we all are witnesses” (2:32). Peter is there with the other eleven apostles. But he also means this larger group of 120 disciples who were there at Pentecost. They were all eyewitnesses of Jesus’ resurrection. So there is plenty of evidence that Peter is telling the truth. First, there was the miracle of speaking in tongues. Then, Peter reminds them of the many miracles Jesus did among them. For three years, he performed miracles all over Israel. Thousands of people witnessed them. And the biggest sign is that Jesus rose from the dead, and there are all these witnesses. Jesus really is the Christ, and there is salvation for everyone who call on his Name.

Verse 33 is where Peter names all three persons of the Trinity. So this is the key verse for Trinity Sunday. But Peter has been talking about the Trinity for his entire sermon, and we might not have noticed. I don’t know if he even noticed. But this whole time he’s been talking about Jesus, the Son of God. So he’s also been talking about God as the Father. And he’s been talking about the Holy Spirit.

There are other passages that are more intentional about teaching the Trinity, like Matthew 28, where Jesus commands his disciples to baptize all nations “**in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**” (28:19). But here it’s just organic. It’s like Peter teaches the Trinity without trying to teach it. And I find that to be very significant. When you talk about God, that is, when you talk about him rightly, you can’t help but talk about the Trinity. It’s just foundational to the whole thing. If you try to talk about God without talking about the Father, it’s just incomplete. You would feel like something necessary is missing. And the same thing is true about Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

I am continually amazed by how the Trinity is taught throughout the entire Bible. In the gospels, Jesus talks about himself, he talks about his Father, and he talks about the Holy Spirit. Throughout the book of Acts and in the epistles, the apostles talk about the Father. They talk about Jesus, the Son. And they talk about the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it seems that they are intentional about laying out the Trinity. But, more often, it’s just organic. If you talk rightly about God, you cannot help but talk about the Trinity.

It comes through in the Old Testament too. There are several passages that speak of the Holy Spirit. And there are passages that speak of the relationship between the LORD, Yahweh, and the Christ. But they don’t speak of the Christ as a mere man. They also speak of him as divine. The example Peter uses in this sermon is from Psalm 110, where David writes,

“The LORD says to my Lord:

Sit at my right hand,

until I make your enemies your footstool” (Ps. 110:1; Acts 2:34).

David was the king of Israel. He had no Lord above himself except God, but he tells of this conversation between God and God. It’s the Father speaking to his Son, the Messiah.

And the Jews during the time of Jesus and the apostles had at least some understanding of this. They knew that there is a Holy Spirit, because the Old Testament speaks of him. And even

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Jesus' opponents, the men who eventually killed him, we see from the ways they talk back to Jesus that when Jesus claimed to be the Christ, they understood that he was claiming to be the Son of God (Mark 14:61) and that he was making himself equal to the Father (John 5:18). They did not object to the notions that God has a Son, nor that the Son is equal to the Father. But they objected to notion that Jesus is that Son of God.

The doctrine of the Trinity is all over the Bible, and it is foundational to any conversation about God.

In this sermon, Peter teaches the way of salvation. And we see all three persons of the Trinity at work. The Father sends the Son, and the Son goes. And you can't have an atonement for sins unless God is at least two persons. The Father pours out the wrath of God, and the Son suffers that wrath. Or to state it in a positive way, because both angles of this are true. The Son offers himself as a sacrifice for sin, and the Father receives that sacrifice. No mere man is able make atonement for all the sins of the world. Even a perfect man could not pay for everyone else's sins. It has to be God, who has infinite value. The atonement for sins needs God on both sides of it. And then Peter also speaks of the Holy Spirit's work, which is to take this message of salvation, and dispense it all over the world. He inspired the words of the apostles. And when we hear the Word of God, the Holy Spirit attends to that Word to convict us of our sins and to convince us of forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit did this very work during Peter's Pentecost sermon. Twice, Peter accused these Jews of murdering the Christ (2:23, 36). This is the most condemning accusation you could ever hear. Some of these people must have been in that same crowd that yelled, "Crucify! Crucify!" (Luke 23:21). Most people would not take it well, being accused of killing the Son of God. But, "When they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said . . . , "Brothers, what shall we do?" (2:37). Instead of being hardened, they were humbled. And who cut them to the heart? The Holy Spirit. That's what he does.

There are times when the Holy Spirit will cut you to the heart. It sounds painful. And it is. But it's not destructive. It's surgical. When he cuts you to the heart, it is for your healing. He's cutting an opening to pour forgiveness into.

And that's exactly what he did at Pentecost. Remember, these people were guilty of Jesus' murder. And, in a way, we are too, because it was our sin that held him to that cross. But Peter spoke this gracious promise to them, and to the entire world, and to you, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (2:38-39).

This, by the way, is one of the reasons why we baptize children. Peter specifically states that the promise is for them, as it is for the entire world. The promise is that our sins will be forgiven, and we will receive the Holy Spirit.

So whenever we talk about God, we can't help but talk about the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And when we understand God rightly, we see that each member of Trinity is for us. The Father is your tender and generous heavenly Father. He gives you all good things, including his Son. And the Son is your gracious Savior, who laid down his life for you, rose again from the dead, and will return to raise you from the dead. And the Holy Spirit is your Helper, who continually calls you to repentance and pours forgiveness into your heart. So rejoice that the Triune God is all for you. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.