**John 3:1-17**

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. **2** This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “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.” **3** Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” **4** Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” **5** Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6**  That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7**  Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ **8**  The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” **9** Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” **10** Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? **11** Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. **12** If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? **13**  No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. **14** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. **16** “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

**“Undivided Holiness”**

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. The first Sunday after Pentecost is a time for us to celebrate the Holy Trinity. Christmas told us what the Father sent out of His love for a sinful world. Easter showed us what the Son did out of love for all. Pentecost taught us what the Spirit proclaims in love until the Last Day. This is the “fullness” of God who is one in essence and yet three distinct persons. To try to analyze this mystery of the Trinity as if we can fully explain God is misleading. The Church confesses in the Athanasian Creed, “…we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance.” For us to “worship” the Trinity means we cannot take the place of being god over God.

Some might point out that “Trinity” is not even in the Bible and they would be right. This is why we speak and baptize in the Name of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet, as early as the 3rd century Tertullian a church father already made a defense for God using the word, “Trinity.” Plenty were trying to confuse or explain away the relationship between God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Seems like a bunch of bickering over words to us, but in the end, God as Trinity protected the Gospel and the foundation of Christianity. If we have said, “I have been to the ocean.” It does not mean you have seen the entire ocean. This is why on Holy Trinity Sunday we test our hearts and minds. Only in Christ can we see the Trinity in fullness as God for us by the Gospel.

When Nicodemus came to speak with Jesus by night, he heard those words repeated to him, “Truly, truly I say to you…” This happens three distinct times, but Jesus holds up one truth. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Nicodemus like anyone had assumptions. He recognized Jesus to be a teacher and miracle worker like a prophet of old. However, to his surprise Jesus went beyond this compliment saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus had all the resources available to him. Success brought him wealth as a Pharisee, knowing the Law meant he was intelligent, and being a ruler of the Jews showed he had respect. Yet, the need to be “born again” proved his strength and glory had failed him.

Christ shows the standard of His Father exceeds what we see. To be “born again” can also be translated “born anew” or “born from above.” For all a person has in terms of reason, feeling, and will. To the Father it is all dead and useless stained and corrupted by sin. This is how Isaiah felt when seeing God saying, “Woe is me! For I am lost…” We are lost if we look to science as the final answer that worships the work of our mind and not be mindful of God. We are lost if we make guesses about God based on feelings that are apart from what Scripture says. We are lost if our will is what matters when it is God’s will alone that gives new life by His grace. Jesus shows what the Father sees is a new birth for sinners.

Nicodemus heard the need, but saw nothing in creation that could do what Jesus described. Having a go around a “second time” with life in the world was not going to make it better. Sin infects us thoroughly from the cradle to the grave. Yet, God comes to us in His fullness. Jesus told him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Since being born had to come “from above,” it was a work outside of us. Only the Holy Spirit could give new birth from heaven. He would do such work in this world by means of water. Nicodemus was to see this life from the promise made in baptism. God was pouring out His Triune Name that creates anew. For Jesus said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

Christ reveals the Spirit gives life to enter His kingdom of grace. Some would restrict this saving work by water and the Word to be only for adults. That only mocks God who alone gives His miracle of life to any sinner. As our Lutheran Fathers teach us it neither reason of will of man, “But only the Holy Spirit causes a person to be born anew and to have inwardly another heart, mind, and natural desire” (FC SD II 25). Jesus sent this promise of baptism to all nations, all people. Peter shared this hope after His sermon on Pentecost. “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…” (Acts 2:38) Baptism is the treasure where God has made us a new creation. This promise remains whenever the law fails us, sin overcomes us, death lays hold of us and the Devil surrounds us.

Nicodemus had heard from Jesus about the Father’s need for new birth. He saw where the Holy Spirit would work by the water of baptism. Jesus at last told this teacher of Israel the fullness of God that stood before him. He said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony.” Here was more than prophet or great teacher. For Jesus to speak, know, and see dealt with the mystery of the Holy Trinity. The Son of Man is God’s Son. Unlike being “born” in baptism, which in Greek is gennhqh. Jesus as the Son of God is monogenh. It means “unique” with the Father or the “only-begotten” Son. An earthly thing like baptism was simple compared to the heavenly truth that Jesus, as the Son, speaks for the Father and Spirit as one God.

Christ declares the Son of man lifted up is to see God’s love for the world. This is the heavenly truth that Nicodemus would hear spoken, see suffering, and know personally at the crucifixion of Jesus. God’s love reaches far beyond reason for the Father offered up His only Son for sinners. God’s love is far more than a feeling for Christ unflinchingly went the way of His cross. God’s love is for a sinful world that is not worthy, but the Spirit still speaks good news of salvation. God has spoken in Christ to all whether a law-abiding citizen or criminal in prison, whether they live in success or regret many mistakes, whether they be a Samaritan woman or a Pharisee like Nicodemus. As Scripture teaches “…in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them…” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

God does not affirm any sin, but does give the answer for sinners. He says, “I forgive you in Christ. I will keep doing it by Word and Sacrament for my Son paid the price. He stands in your place against sin, death, and the Devil. No matter what it is or who you are my love is without limit.” Nicodemus by God’s grace received this love no longer asking questions, but being bold enough to take down Christ’s body from the cross. When the coal from God’s altar touched Isaiah’s mouth removing the guilt of sin He could say, “Send me!” To be born of God by baptism means His Name is in our lives as a witness of His truth and love. Only in Christ can we see the Trinity in fullness as God for us by the Gospel. Amen. Blessed be the Holy Trinity and the undivided Unity. Let us give glory to him because he has shown his mercy to us. Amen.