

“Alien Righteousness”

Mt. 28:16-20

Today, we along with the church around the world, celebrate the Sunday of the Holy Trinity. We do this each year on the Sunday after Pentecost. On this day we recognize, even more than usual, one of the most important realities about God. He is three distinct persons, yet only One God. He is Triune in nature, and no, it doesn't make sense.

The three persons in One God doesn't make any more sense than the Second Person of the Trinity, the Son of God, becoming fully human – the fullness of God embodied in the man Jesus, yet He is still present everywhere. And God dies on the cross (because Jesus is God) and a man rises from the dead because the man is God; and now He comes to you under the form of bread and wine to feed you with His divinely human flesh and blood. No, it doesn't make sense.

As I like to say, if I only believe the things about God that I understand with my mind, then the God that I believe in can only be as smart as me – and that would be frightening. Martin Luther takes this further. He says (in this week's Word from Martin Luther printed in the bulletin), “If I do not understand how the Persons are differentiated, it is enough for me that Holy Scriptures say this and call Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit by name (Matt. 28:19). If I could grasp this with my reason or senses, what need would there be for faith? Of what use is Scripture revealed by God through the Holy Spirit? If I believe nothing but what I can comprehend by my reason, I must reject Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar, the Word, grace, original sin, and everything. Reason understands none of these things.”

We confess what Luther says in the Catechism, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him.” I certainly cannot by my own reason or strength completely understand the fullness of the nature of the Almighty God. If I rely upon what is inside of me (my reason, my strength, my mind, my understanding); if I rely upon me, I will never know Him.

I certainly will never know the Father, because Jesus says, “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” [Jn. 14:6]. And if no one can know the Father except through Jesus, and I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but through the Holy Spirit who calls me by the Gospel and enlightens me with His gifts, then everything that I have in relation to God comes from outside of me.

So the Holy Spirit is the One who creates this faith in you – faith in Jesus, the Son of God who was born as a human to be the second Adam, died as a sacrifice to take away your sin, rose again so that

death would be defeated for us all. This faith is created in you by something that comes from outside of you.

Caleb the Camel talked about this during Vacation Bible School this week. Do you remember what he called it? Alien righteousness – not little green guys from outer space. Alien – as it is foreign to you; it comes from outside of you; the dictionary definition of alien is that it belongs to someone else. Your righteousness does not well up from within. It belongs to someone else. The righteousness you have is Christ's righteousness.

The Holy Spirit has called you by the Gospel. St. Paul says, "Faith comes by hearing." A few weeks ago, we read in Peter's first epistle, "Baptism now saves you." In Baptism, the righteousness of Christ was placed upon you. It is "alien." It belongs to someone else, but Jesus has chosen to give it to you as a gift.

This is why He gave the instructions that He did to the disciples. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Baptize all the people. Give them the righteousness that comes from outside of them – the righteousness that comes from Christ. It is alien. It does not belong to you. It has been given as a free gift.

And each week, as we gather to worship and praise God and receive His gifts of Word and Sacrament, we begin with a reminder of our Baptism as we begin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

This is the name into which we were baptized. This is the name of the Living, Almighty God. On this day, this Sunday of the Holy Trinity, we marvel at the unknowable nature of God. He is infinite. He is incomprehensible. Yet, He is here, and in Baptism He chose to place His name upon you. He chose to take the guilt of your sin and place it on Jesus. And He chose to take the righteousness that belongs to Him (that is alien to you) and cover you with the righteousness of Christ.

There have been many attempts to describe this Almighty, Infinite, Eternal, Living God. The best way to explain Him is what He says about Himself in His Word. He is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” for you. Amen.