

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin R. Eden

Holy Trinity Sunday
Saturday, June 6, 2020 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, June 7, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

“Alien Righteousness”

Matthew 28:16-20

It is so good to be back with you – worshiping as the church, the ecclesia, the gathering of people. We were just so blessed to be able to share the Word with you through the Internet these past three months. 2020 has been quite a year. When the invasion of “Murder Hornets” doesn’t make the top five, it has been quite the year.

On Friday, I posted a meme on Facebook with Kermit the Frog looking out a rain-soaked window saying, “Sounds like thunder outside, but with the way 2020 is going it could be Godzilla.” It is so good to see you here, and for those joining us via Facebook, we all look forward to seeing you when you are able.

We are not the first society to endure a “Year of Horrors.” The year was 451 AD – Romans called it the “Year of Horrors.” Shortly after Easter, Attila the Hun crossed the Rhine River with an army of half a million Huns. They plundered through Germany and Gaul (modern day France). There were a few weddings and graduations that got postponed that year.

Rome was already dealing with invasions from barbarians from the north, and a great “Migration of Nations” was taking place as millions were displaced and forced to leave their homelands in northern Europe because the Roman optimum had ended around the year 400 AD. The Roman optimum was a warm period which began around 250 BC. When it ended, it made parts of Europe uninhabitable. The Saxons emigrated to Great Britain. The Visigoths emigrated to North Africa, along the way, they laid siege to Rome for two years – finally sacking

the city in 410 AD before they left. By 451 AD, the “Year of Horrors,” what was left of the great Roman Empire was falling apart before their very eyes.

And just what was the church doing during this time of unrest? Where were the church leaders in the midst of all this turmoil? What were they doing in the “Year of Horrors?” They were huddled together in a church in the town of Chalcedon, near modern-day Istanbul, Turkey discussing the doctrine of the Trinity – especially having to do with our Lord Jesus Christ. They were crafting the “Chalcedon formula.” It was further clarification of the Nicene Formula put forth at the Council of Nicea 126 years earlier, and would now be ratified at Chalcedon as the Nicene Creed.

Since Nicea, further false teachings had arisen concerning Jesus and further clarification was needed concerning that Christ is one person, with a human and a divine nature, and those natures are “without division, without separation, without change, and without confusion.” As the world fell apart all around them, they were busy clarifying the reality of who God is, and were laying the foundation for the statement of faith which would later be known as the Athanasian Creed.

People might look back on that period and think to themselves, “why wasn’t the church present, in the midst of the turmoil, addressing real, societal issues that were wreaking havoc all around?” In other words, “Hey church, why don’t you say something relevant!” But the truth is, the church was doing what the church was supposed to be doing, exactly what the church needed to be doing.

Today, we along with the church around the world have something relevant to say as we 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 is not easy to comprehend.

As I like to say, if you only believe the things about God that you understand in your mind, then the God that you believe in can only be as smart as you are – 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” (AE 12:288).

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 can only know Him 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.

We have spoken about this in our Bible class recently. There is something from outside of myself that saves me. In theological terms, we call this “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 or something 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” – the external Word from outside of you. Faith is not “figuring God out” inside your mind. 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 again and praise God and receive His gifts of Word (and Sacrament in a couple of weeks), 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 Athanasian Creed is still the best the most complete succinct summary of who He is. But the most clear description of God is what He says about Himself in His Word, and is what gives us confidence even if we find ourselves in our own “Year of Horrors.” He is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” for you. So much so, He sent His only Son to willingly shift the guilt of your sin upon Himself and place His righteousness on you. Amen.