

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge
Sermon- Acts 1:1-11
Sunday, May 28, 2017

The Trinity

1. In your bulletins is a handout with a diagram on it. For those that were at our study on the Trinity, you have seen this before. Since not everyone makes it to bible study, I wanted to pass it out for you all, as I will be talking about the Trinity today.
 - a. Trinity Sunday is in two weeks and this is Ascension Sunday; but the reading from Acts 1 is a perfect place to see the Trinity, so I thought it worth spending some time on today.
2. The Trinity is one of the central doctrines of the Christian faith, but isn't the most easily understood. We worship God, who is one in essence or being, but three in person. Our God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We may not think of it this way, but that is his name. God is "Trinity." He is "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." The three persons together co-exist as the one God that we worship.
3. Because it is so easy to fall into heresy or false belief on the topic of the Trinity, I have found this diagram to be very helpful. Most analogies for the Trinity fail and fall into some category of false teaching. This diagram helps us to avoid that. It shows us that each person- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit- are God. Yet the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father. They co-exist, and have since eternity past. There was never a time when all three persons of the Trinity were not together in relationship as the one God.
 - a. God did not initially reveal himself as Trinity, but once he does, it becomes clear that he was merely obfuscating that reality throughout the OT because it wasn't yet time for him to reveal himself in his fullness.
4. The major false teachings regarding the Trinity end up either breaking the Trinity into three gods, or a God, and two sub-gods, which overturns monotheism. Or it collapses all three persons back into one person, suggesting that God simply shows himself as Father, Son, or Spirit at any given time. Both of these are wrong, and our readings for today help us to see that.
5. There are at least three separate references in our reading from Acts that show that Jesus is separate from the Spirit, and the Father. But let's just look at vs. 4-5: And while staying with them he [Jesus] ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."
6. These two verses reference the three persons as individuals. The Son references the promises of the Father that he will send the Holy Spirit. Each person is separate, with a separate function; yet all three are part of the godhead.
 - a. I am not going to go into how we see them all as God, because we will have readings for that in two weeks. But our readings for today do show us clearly that all three are separate persons.
 - b. The Father sends the Son, who comes, teaches, dies, rises, and ascends. The Father sends the Spirit who regenerates and calls us into relationship with the Father through the Son. The Son and the Spirit are subordinate to the Father, which can also be seen clearly from our gospel reading in John 17. The Son is praying to the Father that the Father will grant him what he asks, and talks about

his faithfulness to the Father's commands. Yet, he also talks about the glory he has had with the Father since the very beginning.

The Ascension

1. We will talk more next week (Pentecost) about the Holy Spirit. What we see in the book of Acts is that each member of the Trinity has their function. The gospels show us that Jesus is working in obedience to the Father. Then he ascends and the Spirit comes so that we now live in the age of the Spirit.
2. Acts 2 begins with the Holy Spirit. For now, Acts 1 shows us the conclusion of Jesus' work. He tells of the fulfillment of the next promise of the sending of the Spirit, and then he ascends to heaven. Hebrews tells us that after he ascends, he was seated at the right hand of the Father. This speaks of the completion of his work. As the angels tell the disciples, "This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."
 - a. For now, his work is complete, until the second coming.
3. I don't share all of this so that you will have a repository of theology- though that is certainly a good enough reason to tell you. The ascension has real meaning in our lives. It really affects us as Christians and as people.
4. First, Jesus had to leave in order for the Spirit to come. Prior to Pentecost, the Spirit was given sparingly. During Jesus' ministry, the Spirit rested on him as a prophet. As he tells us in the gospel of John, it wasn't until he left that the Spirit would be sent more fully. It is because of the ascension that Pentecost could happen, and because of Pentecost that we have access to the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.
5. Second, Jesus' ascension signals the end of his work, and that is significant because his work was for us. We are not waiting for a savior. We are not waiting for God to act in our lives. We are not waiting for our sins to be forgiven. Jesus has already come, fulfilled the terms of the covenant, established the New Covenant in his blood, and saved his people. As he cried out on the cross, "It is finished." His work is completed on our behalf. And it is already effective for every person for whom it was intended. There is nothing waiting to be done, or left for us to do in order to be saved.
 - a. We wait for the Holy Spirit to apply it individually through his call of regeneration. But the work is done.
 - b. This also means that we don't have to worry about losing our salvation. That was the work of God in Christ. Christ has ascended and is seated at the right hand of the Father. The work is completed. What God has done can't be undone.
6. So the ascension is significant because it gives us the comfort and hope in knowing that the work of salvation, of atonement, of resurrection, has all been completed. In Christ, we are saved and adopted as sons and daughters of the Father, and that can never be undone. It should be comforting that salvation belongs to the Lord; and that his work of salvation is already complete.