

John 16:12-15 *"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. ¹³But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. ¹⁵All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

I'll bet that you didn't think you were gathering for worship today to celebrate a holiday. I don't mean a secular holiday like Father's Day. I'm talking about a religious holy day—a day of special focus for God's people. Today is Trinity Sunday. We have tendency to view Trinity Sunday as just another day, perhaps the day that kicks off those twenty or so "Sundays after Pentecost" that shift our focus from Jesus' life to the Church's life and the Christian life. But the real meaning of Trinity Sunday is certainly worth our attention. Back in the 11th and 12th centuries, Christian churches in England began celebrating Trinity Sunday. By the 14th century, Christian churches universally were observing this special celebration once a year. There was some controversy over why we should take a day to have a special focus on the Trinity when we as God's people acknowledge the Trinity every Sunday. While there are different answers we could give for why we take a special day each year to focus on the Trinity, perhaps it is the Athanasian Creed which says it best. In some Christian churches—including ours—it is custom to speak the fifth-century Athanasian Creed as a statement of faith during worship on Trinity Sunday. We'll do that responsively after the sermon. This creed which was written as a defense of the doctrine of the Trinity states this: "Whoever wishes to be saved must have this conviction of the Trinity." That's a big statement. The doctrine of the Trinity is so important that if you do not believe in the Trinity, you cannot be saved. It sounds pretty harsh, but it's true. This tells us that it is important for us to have this doctrine as a central part of our focus on a regular basis and is worthy of a special emphasis at least once a year.

Here's the problem. The doctrine of the Trinity is hard to understand. It's hard to put into words just exactly what the Trinity is much less comprehend how it's all possible. We're going to read the Athanasian Creed responsively and you will understand exactly what I mean. It's clunky. It's wooden. It's trying to explain simply what is impossible to fully comprehend. Our God whom we worship is 3 persons in 1 God. Each person of the Trinity—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—are separate and distinct beings yet there is only 1 God. They are separate and distinct while at the same time being fully unified as one. If were to do what I call in Catechism "Trinity math" we would say: 1+1+1=1! Because it's so hard to comprehend, it has caused major issues in the Christian church at different times over the last 20 centuries. We can't fully grasp or comprehend this and trying to fully do so with a limited, human, sinful mind will only lead us to problems.

Yet this incomprehensible doctrine is essential for us to hold to in order for us to be saved. Someone once said, "If you fully try to understand the Trinity, you'll lose your marbles. But, if you deny the Trinity, you'll lose your soul." So perhaps, what's best for us as we focus our attention on the Trinity today is to accept by faith the doctrine of the Trinity—3 persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in one undivided God—as it is laid out for us in Scripture and to rejoice over the blessings which God brings to us through his unique being. God doesn't want us to try to figure out the Trinity nor for us to be divided because of this doctrine. He wants us to know one simple thing: ***The Triune God Works Actively for Our Salvation.***

Jesus was speaking with his disciples on the night before his death just shortly before his arrest. Their hearts were heavy with grief because Jesus had just told them that he was going away. Their hearts were heavy because they didn't understand what this meant. At this time, they didn't fully realize the necessity of Christ's suffering and death in the Father's plan to carry out our salvation. Their ignorance of the full situation caused them to be filled with grief and anxiety. Jesus recognized this. So he backed away from this conversation and promised them that when all of it was over, he would send them the Spirit of Truth who would guide them so they could understand the truth of what was happening. When he did that, they would see that what was about to happen to Jesus was not outside his control or beyond his ability to stop. What was about to happen would glorify Jesus because it would show his tremendous love not only for them but for all of humankind. Their human instinct with their limited understanding was to feel abandoned and betrayed because Jesus was about to leave them. The Holy Spirit whom they would receive after Jesus left them would help them to see that all of this was necessary to carry out the Father's plan for salvation.

This is the main point for us to understand when it comes to our Triune God. His main goal in all that he does is the salvation of his people. We may not understand how it's possible to be a three in one God. We may not grasp the fact that they are separate and fully united and undivided at the same time. But understanding that relationship is not important. What is important is understand how this Triune God acts in full unity to bring about one desired outcome: our salvation! The Father saw from the moment Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden the problem that confronted every human who would live after them—you and me included. Sin now came into the world and it brought death to every single human. It's hard for us to imagine a world where there is no death, but that was the world Adam and Eve lived in before the fall. With their sin, the entire world changed. Death now entered the world. It would be the one enemy we could not overcome. It would be the one problem that every single person would face. We all face many and different problems in our world, but the one problem we all have in common is death. We not only face the reality of losing those whom we love to death. We face the reality that one day every one of us is going to die.

That's a truth that's hard to bear. We don't like to think about death. We don't want to have to even talk about it. I have heard of people who don't want to put their will together because they don't want to jinx themselves and bring death.

I've got a secret: you are going to die. It's the reality we all face because of sin. That's hard to grasp with our minds. We don't want to admit that we are responsible for our own death because we are sinners. We try to hide that fact by convincing ourselves that we really aren't that bad of people, we try to do good, there are certainly worse people than we are and that we certainly haven't done anything so bad that would make us worthy of that. But God says differently. Very plainly we are told, "*The one who sins is the one who will die.*" (Ezekiel 18:20) That means even one sin—however, small, minor, insignificant, known or whatever it might be—brings with it the punishment of death. That's the harsh, blunt reality that confronts us all.

Our heavenly Father knew that. He also knew that we would not be able to overcome this on our own. Rather than destroy the creatures he had made, our gracious, loving, heavenly Father made a promise: he would send a savior who would rescue us from death. But he couldn't send just any Savior. He had to send a Savior who would be perfect and who would still be subject to death. He had to send someone who would be subject to God's law but keep it perfectly. He sent the only one who could do this so that his death could be recorded as payment for our sin: His only Son. This Savior had to be human so he could be subject to the law and die. He had to be God so he could keep that law perfectly and that his death could count for our death. The Father sent his Son with one goal in mind: to secure our salvation.

The disciples didn't understand this fully. They didn't understand that what would happen to Jesus over the next few days would be all part of God's plan to rescue his people so they could live in heaven with him forever. So Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit who would help them to understand. We know Jesus did all that was necessary for our salvation. He kept God's law perfectly and offered his perfect life on Calvary's cross as he suffered hell in payment for our sin. He rose from the grave to defeat death and to declare to all that God accepted his sacrifice. Yet his work for our salvation had one more element to it: then he sent the Holy Spirit as he promised these disciples to awake hearts to faith and grant understanding to help them see the big picture of all that Jesus did here. But that Holy Spirit had to be God also...for one specific reason. Only God can waken hearts from spiritual death to life. Only God can raise the dead to life which the Holy Spirit did when he came through Word and Sacrament to bring us to faith. His message wasn't his own. It was the same message the Father had been preaching from the beginning. His message had one purpose and goal in mind: to bring salvation for his people. The Father sent the Son to bring about our salvation. The Father and the Son sent and continue to send the Holy Spirit to bring this salvation to each person who believes personally. The Triune God continues to work actively for our salvation.

It is important that we keep this truth in our minds. It is essential that we keep this main goal in front of us as we continue forward. When you look at everything we face in life from this perspective and with this goal in front of us, we see a completely different picture. If all that we know of God is that he is a God who demands perfection and punishes any imperfection with complete abandonment, we have no hope. That really affects our view on life. Then all the challenges which confront us and all the disappointments we encounter and sufferings we face we would see as punishment from a God who demands more than we could ever give. We would feel as if God abandoned us and turned his back on us to leave us all alone. This would breed resentment and even hatred toward him. We would rebel against him and want to do our own thing in everything.

This isn't who God is. While God does demand perfection, he loves us so much that he devised a plan, sent his Son to carry out that plan and sent the Holy Spirit to help us understand that plan so that we can live with him forever. This means our Triune God doesn't delight in destroying us but is active in saving us. He desires not evil, wicked things for us but has in mind at our times what is best for us and is actively working at all times for our salvation. So much of our anxiety and grief in life over situations that we face comes because we have the wrong understanding about God or are viewing things from the wrong perspective. Understanding God's desire to save us and that he is actively working to keep us in faith puts a whole different perspective on our lives. Now the challenges we face each and every day are not punishment from God for something we have done, but a reminder of our need to rely on God and trust his promises while we are here as well as a reminder there is a better life waiting for us in heaven. This means the physical sufferings we are asked to endure, whatever they may be, do not mean our God has abandoned us but are an opportunity for us to trust in his promises and focus our eyes on the eternity that awaits. This means the obstacles that stand in our way of moving forward to bring God's grace to the world are not impossible barriers that turn us away but rather opportunities for us to give our all and see God's amazing power and grace at work. Now, in everything that we face, rather than seeing God against us, we are able to see God for us as he actively works together, Father, Son and Holy Spirit for our salvation.

This side of heaven, we are never going to fully understand the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit as three separate persons in one undivided God. That's ok. God doesn't ask us to. He simply asks us to treasure the blessings which he brings to us, the most important of which is the salvation he alone can bring. In humble faith, we set aside our limited, human reason and take God at his word. He is the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—who is actively working in all things for our salvation. To him alone be our praise and glory for now and eternity. Amen!