**John 16:12-15** June 12, 2022

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Trinity Sunday

*John 16:12 [Jesus said,] “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 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 bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. 15All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**A Portrait: The Trinity**

At the family gathering you look around and your sister says, “Wouldn’t grandma love to see us all together?” Someone else says, “Wouldn’t grandpa enjoy this backyard bonfire?” When a moment reminds of what was most beautiful about a loved one, we say things like that. It is right to do so.

There’s something else we say about the deceased. It expresses something even deeper than beauty. “I wish I would have asked Dad about \_\_\_\_ when he was still with us.” When people are taken from us, we lose something. We lose some of what made life beautiful. And we lose a treasure house of experience, knowledge and advice. Oh, God will take care of us. We believe that. We will find joy in other places. There will be others to guide us. But the loss is still a loss.

John 16 was Jesus’ last night with his disciples. It was the fork in the road. He would soon leave them. They didn’t get it. They just didn’t get it! When Jesus let them know that their ways would part one said to another, *“What does he mean by saying, ‘In a little while you will see me no more?’”* Classic case of denial! Not that it was evil or willful, it was just who we are—some things are too tough to swallow all in one bite. Jesus looked at them and told them, ***“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.”***

***“More than you can now bear…”*** Parents realize those moments. Teachers realize those moments. We have something important to say, but the timing is wrong. We can explain things just so far, and then we have to wait a week or a year or a decade before revealing the next layer. Beloved adopted children—when do you tell them? A family secret where people think, “Something just isn’t right!”—when does the truth come out? Should it? Ever? At his last supper Jesus had given his disciples as much as they could hear, as much as they could bear. He had more to tell them, but at this point it would have been counter-productive. It would have to wait till later.

Jesus knew what that would do to them. Later they would want to kick themselves and say, “I wish I would have asked Jesus about \_\_\_\_ when he was still with us!” When the first of them was martyred, wouldn’t they want Jesus to be there to circle the wagons? When it became obvious that God had opened the floodgates of salvation to the Gentiles and all their Jewish sensitivities and sensibilities were being violated, wouldn’t they wish Jesus could give them equilibrium? What about when people brought tough questions, when believers experienced the worst life can dish out? Where’s Jesus?

Jesus knew his Twelve would later feel lost without him. That’s why he told them what he told them here. He told them that though he would leave them, they will not be left as spiritual orphans. Jesus was not able to tell them everything. He had wanted to tell them more, but they couldn’t take any more. Never fear! They weren’t trudging on alone. Jesus assured them, ***“When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth”*** (13). “Don’t worry about me going away. I will be sure that you still have a reliable source of truth.”

This source of knowledge and truth would be bigger than any of them individually or all of them put together. The Twelve Apostles won’t come upon theological questions, and then do an impersonation of our Supreme Court with its 5-4 decisions. Is that what truth is? A 5-4 vote? If it really is truth, shouldn’t it be 9-0 every time? But that’s what we humans do. We mess it up. That’s why Jesus’ disciples would rightly wish Jesus could stay with them. We always mess stuff up! Jesus promised his followers that in his physical absence we will have a source of God’s truth down to our own day. The giver will be the Spirit of Truth, and that truth is God’s Word.

At this point Jesus expands on the work of the Holy Spirit. Now in a sermon, that is what I would usually focus on. Asking God’s blessing, I usually try to make the main point of the reading the main point of my preaching. But on this Trinity Sunday, we don’t seize on the main point of what Jesus says—not to ignore it—but there is a secondary point, an important point, that can kind of sneak under the radar. Underneath the main point, Jesus also reveals to us things about God.

Now some might think this isn’t such an important thing. “I know whom I worship. You don’t need to tell me, preacher!” Well, some might think that way, but if we truly love God, shouldn’t we want to know him, and well?

Back in college I had a classmate, a very good friend—how good? One spring break I let him borrow my car to drive home to the West Coast. Well, this friend of mine was adopted. He had been adopted very very young. I don’t think he ever knew his birth mother. God had blessed him with a very good life in the home of his adoptive parents. They were good and godly people, owners of a modest family business, loving parents who also loved each other. My friend had only good to say about them. But finally, somewhere beyond the age of twenty, he felt a need to find out about his birth mother. It wasn’t out of any sort of dissatisfaction with his adoptive parents. Not at all. And, he weighed the decision with his eyes wide open. He was old enough and self-aware enough to know that what he would find out probably wouldn’t be good, or at least not happy. I’m not sure if he did pursue it or not. But the point is, he had this intense desire to know his birth mother. All of us can understand that. Even if the situations were less than ideal, it is as natural as the rising sun to want to know about the ones who have given us life.

How much more should we want to know our God who has brought us only good. He paid a dear price, the price of tortured blood dripping down a wooden cross to redeem us from our sins. He has enlightened us with the Gospel and given us saving faith in God the Son. He has provided His Church here on earth to guide and guard us in this Christian faith. Every day we experience God’s goodness in the beauty of nature, the joy of friends, the satisfaction of good food. When someone treats you that well, it is natural to want to know about them. Only a grateless wretch can take a wealth of gifts and not be interested in the giver of those gifts.

When God reveals things about himself, it is time for us to sit quietly around the campfire and listen. What God reveals about himself in John 16 is that he is Triune, one God in three persons. And someone pipes up, “That doesn’t make sense?” At which we simply have to say, “This is what our good and gracious God tells us about himself, so listen!”

Now part of the mystery is that there really isn’t anywhere in the Bible where the Bible teaches at length about the Trinity. That has led some (namely, Jehovah’s Witness, many Pentecostals and atheists) to say that the concept of the Trinity is a made-up concept, unbiblical.

But here’s the thing. While you can say, “The word Trinity never appears in the Bible,” that ignores the fact that there are about a dozen different places where the Bible speaks of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, all within a single sentence or two. Each time it is these same three. There is never a fourth. Never is something or someone else substituted for one of the three. It is the same three. There is this threeness about God that God reveals about himself, hints at, suggests, whispers, time and again, but avoids totally spelling out. It’s like he’s saying, “I’m going to tell you something that is too big for you grasp, but I’m going to let you listen and absorb as much as you can, and you will just have to leave the rest to faith.”

One of those sentences mentioning Father, Son and Holy Spirit is verse 15 of this reading. Since Jesus is the one speaking, when Jesus uses the word ***“I,”*** he is talking about himself, God the Son. So here is verse 15: ***“All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.”*** All three are mentioned. They are mentioned so smoothly that you almost don’t notice. Yet careful listeners hear and notice a distinction. These are not three names of the same thing. That’s why some people like Muslims and Jews, somewhat understandably, accuse Christians of worshiping three gods.

Yet there is a unity. At first, the way verse 15 says it, it sounds like something three people could say about each other: ***“All that belongs to the Father is mine…”*** But really, it isn’t the same. Jesus says that all that belongs to the Father is his. Think about what that includes. That includes the knowledge, the glory, the power. No mere human can say that. No angel could say that. Only God can say that. And if we were to go further through the Scriptures, we would hear again and again about this sharing, only it’s not just handing off stuff, it is that they share the same essence.

By way of contrast, through marriage we might say that by default all that belongs to the husband legally belongs to the wife, and vice versa. But here we are just talking about property. We are not talking about ***“all”*** that belongs to the one belongs to the other. Aside from the fact that one has XY chromosomes and the other XX chromosomes, (they obviously can’t share that), they have different personalities and experiences and histories and hopes for the future. That’s not like the unity within the Trinity.

By way of contrast, again, we might think of the gods of the Greeks or Romans. Those Greek (or Roman) gods and goddesses had no unity among them. They were always fighting one against another, deceiving and being deceived; some greater, some lesser. That is nothing like the unity within the Trinity. Among Father, Son and Holy Spirit there is complete harmony always. Not even a difference of opinion, never a flare of animosity. And their unity goes beyond mere agreement. It is oneness. The Old Testament Scripture itself says, *“The Lord our God, the Lord is one,”* (Dt 6:4), and then Jesus repeated it from his own mouth in Mark 12:29.

But wait, I thought the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are separate? They are. But they’re not. “What is the Father’s is mine, and what is mine is also the Spirit’s.” The point is that there is a unity and yet plurality in God, and as God tells it to us by the campfire, we sit there with wide-eyed wonder, like we might for a new family story from grandpa, and we just say “Wow! That’s great!” And as the sparks ascend to the twinkling stars, we absorb it and treasure it and try to remember as much of this amazing truth as possible.

Which is what Jesus wanted this truth to do to his disciples on the night before his death. ***“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear… All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.”*** He wanted to assure them that they would not be lost when Jesus had died, risen and ascended. They would not be living on mere memories, hoping they remembered the path that Jesus had mapped out for them. No. They would be given the Holy Spirit who would be exactly what Jesus had been to them.

These words teach us also not to complain that we did not live when our Savior walked the earth. We, too, can rest secure and confident in the Holy Spirit. He still speaks to us, with exactly as much insight and depth as the Son of God spoke when he walked the earth. Now the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the Word of Truth, this ever so significant book called the Bible. He speaks of the Father sending the Son as revealed by the Holy Spirit. One God, three persons. May the Triune God revealed herein be our hope and stay and joy always. Amen.