

Introductory

This text is not appointed to be read on any Sunday in the one-year TLH lectionary. The reading appointed for Trinity Sunday is John 3: 1-15. In LW, this text is appointed to be read in the One-Year Series, and for this Sunday Year A of the three-year series. LSB has the John 3 text appointed for Holy Trinity in the One Year Series as well.

It's always a good time to invite the hearer to stop and look around at where we are in the Church's year. Beginning with the Advent Season, we have been following the life and work of Jesus in a mostly chronological order. The Ascension of Jesus, which comes forty days after the Resurrection, marks the end of His walking about on the earth.

Pentecost, ten days after that, is generally considered to be the beginning of the Christian Church, as we see the baton being passed on from Jesus to His Apostles and the others, who will continue proclaiming Him in His absence. They will also write it down – those writings appear in the Bible = so we can continue to proclaim the same thing as they did.

Don't spend too much time in the sermon trying to explain the Trinity.

You have probably heard that Trinity Sunday is the only Sunday on the calendar that observes and celebrates a doctrine. That statement, while not untrue, does not fully articulate the importance of the day. We are talking about the Holy Trinity, the One that Jesus calls "The One True God," and the doctrine of God is a very important doctrine.

On a very fundamental level, we should begin this season that focuses on the teachings of Jesus by teaching of The Triune God revealed most fully in that same Jesus. This being the teaching season, it ought to be noted that in preaching, we should not hold to a sharp dividing line between proclamation and teaching. The elements of both are very similar.

Good preaching should proclaim the Gospel, "Christ crucified," and it should also teach about the Gospel and other things. Good Christian teaching includes proclamation of the Gospel, and in nine years in the classroom of Lutheran High Schools, I was able to proclaim the Gospel daily in the classroom, as well as at daily chapel services.

It's a good thing when people come out of church and say, "I learned something today," or even better, "I have been hearing that text (the Baptism of Jesus) all my life, and I finally understand what it means." Paul preached "Christ crucified," but if you look at his actual preaching and teaching as recorded in the NT, he did not limit it to only that.

This Sunday we should proclaim the Good News that the One True God is a loving and merciful God, and that out of His love He has created, redeemed, and sanctified us. We should also teach about the Trinitarian God. The Creed is a good place to start. Any of them will do, but they are most familiar with the Apostles' Creed, so maybe start there.

If you read the Athanasian Creed (p. 319), which we read in its entirety on Trinity Sunday, then reference it. Go ahead and quote at will from *Luther's Small Catechism*, and if you can do that from memory, all the better. It assures people that you aren't expecting something from the little ones that you aren't willing or able to do yourself.

Most people don't really know what a creed is, and since they say one in church every Sunday, I'm fairly certain that they would like to know, so tell them. I know just enough Spanish to know that "creo" ("credo" in Latin) is "I believe," which happen to be the first two words of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. A creed is a statement of belief(s).

Tell them that these Three Ecumenical Creeds are "trinitarian" creeds and what you mean by that explain where they came from, their historical context and import, that adherence to the doctrine they proclaim has historically distinguished "Christian" church bodies from those that aren't, that not all churches believe in the concept of creed and why.

Tell them why we *do* believe in the concept of creeds – they are in the Bible – and why. Teach things that you know that their knowing would give them a better understanding of their religion. Christians should understand and be able to explain the concept of One God, Three Persons. People learn vocabulary words by hearing and using those words.

Talk about each of those three separate persons, explaining who they are and what they primarily do. Such a thing outlines well, if you do that sort of thing. The Person of Christ has Two Natures; Divine Nature and Human. Note that words like "person" and "nature" are old words, and to Christians each of them have a very specific meaning.

Matthew goes right from the bribing of the guards, shortly after the Resurrection, to Galilee, to today's mountain. If this incident indeed takes place immediately before the Ascension, then that means that Matthew entirely left out the forty days between the Resurrection and that event, while Luke and John have a lot to say about those days.

This pericope is well-known as The Great Commission, and these particular words of Jesus have been, from Postwar (WWII) until now, very much a focal point of how we in the LCMS – and some of the rest – see ourselves as a church body. When this pericope has been proclaimed and taught, it has most often been proclaimed and taught as the Law.

Where are these churches getting the sign that proclaims the Law, “You Are Now Entering the Mission Field?” The Law has its purpose, but don’t forget the Gospel. Go and tell people about Jesus (Law), but don’t forget to listen to the Good News that He has for you, and then leave your people with “peace” ringing in their ear on the way out.

Textual Notes

16. Matthew calls them “Οἱ δὲ ἑνδεκα μαθηταὶ - The eleven disciples.” He does not call them “apostles,” but when Matthew talks about “the twelve,” Apostles is what he means. And then, after the departure of Judas when he says, “the eleven,” he’s talking about the Apostles, who have been and will be sent out by Jesus Himself to continue His work.

Those eleven “ἐπορεύθησαν εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν – went into Galilee,” but not right away. Then more specifically, “εἰς τὸ ὄρος οὗ ἐτάξατο αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς – to the mountain that Jesus had designated to them.” Galilee is mentioned frequently in all four gospels, and Jesus spent a lot of time there. Matthew mentions Galilee three times in this last chapter.

On Easter Sunday morning (7), at the tomb, we hear the “angel” instructing the women to tell the men that Jesus has risen from the dead, and that He is going “to Galilee; there you will see him.” As the women are going to do that task, Jesus Himself meets them, and He tells them to “go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”

We know from Luke and John that the men did not follow these very explicit instructions, at least not at first. We also know from John that the reason why they were in a room with all the openings closed and locked was “fear of the Jews.” The picture that emerges is that of men who are petrified with fear, unable to take any sort of action.

They are unable even to leave the sanctuary of that room, and we find them still in it at least a full week after the first appearance of Jesus to them. But they are at some point able to screw up the courage – or at least able to overcome their fears – to leave that room and make their way to Galilee, where they meet Jesus. That’s where we find them now.

The verb “τάσσω – designated” is an aorist middle indicative which bespeaks orderliness, organization, and of somebody with a plan. The mountain to which they were directed is not named, but it apparently was known to them, because they went to it, and no hesitancy or uncertainty is indicated. Luke tells us that the Ascension was from Bethany.

17. When they saw Jesus, they seem to go oxymoron, “προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν – they worshipped Him; but they doubted.” Both verbs are aorist active, simple past action, focus on the action. The first verb is προσκυνέω says literally, “towards to kiss,” and it means a bending of the knee to the ground as if to kiss the ground, but to worship.

It occurs sixty times in the NT, and is the typical word used for one who is revering another. In the NT, it is most often used when one is revering God. The second verb is

διστάζω, literally “two standing,” which pretty much says it all. This is the person who is straddling both sides of the fence, a precarious position, not to mention uncomfortable.

Observing these humans in the time of Jesus, we note that they are a lot like the humans in our own time. The disciples of Jesus continue to worship Him on Sunday morning, while continuing to have doubts and confusion about their lives and their religion. Sometimes things come up that test the most solid faith. And they’re back on Sunday.

On the one hand, they had heard Him proclaim no less than three times – recorded in each of the synoptics – that He was going to Jerusalem, and the end of that trip would be His resurrection from the dead. Now there He is, standing in front of them. On the other hand, was this really Jesus, and was He really standing there, or was this all just a dream?

Several heretical sects of Phantasiasts – the most well-known was the Docetists – held that Jesus only “appeared” to be present post-resurrection. I don’t think a lot of people are talking about – I don’t think Phantasiasts are really an issue today, but how many Christians go to the Sacrament not understanding or doubting the presence of Jesus there?

Most of the Commentaries concur with the idea that both worship and doubt were twinned among the Apostles, but others think the doubt does not apply to them but extends beyond them. Jamieson-Fausset-Brown echoes several other commentaries,

And when they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted—
certainly none of "the Eleven," after what took place at previous
interviews in Jerusalem. But if the five hundred were now present, we may
well believe this of some of them.

Robert Jamieson, Andrew Robert Fausset, and David Brown were 19th Century British Pastors who did not hold advanced degrees. All were parish pastors (two Anglican, one Free Church of Scotland), and when Brown went to teach at the University of Aberdeen, he continued to serve as a parish pastor. We in the LCMS should learn from his example.

They are speaking, of course, of the five hundred mentioned by Paul in 1 Corinthians (15: 6). Paul places that appearance to them “ἐφάπαξ – at once,” all of them at the same time and place, but he does not specify what that location is. The three Pastors who wrote an excellent commentary think the place to be here, at the time and place of the Ascension.

6. five hundred—This appearance was probably on the mountain (Tabor, according to tradition), in Galilee, when His most solemn and public appearance, according to His special promise, was vouchsafed (Mt 26:32; 28:7, 10, 16). He "appointed" this place, as one remote from Jerusalem, so that believers might assemble there more freely and securely. Alford's theory of Jerusalem being the scene, is improbable; as such a multitude of believers could not, with any safety, have met in one place in the

metropolis, after His crucifixion there. The number of disciples (Ac 1:15) at Jerusalem shortly after, was one hundred and twenty, those in Galilee and elsewhere not being reckoned.

18. These worshipping and/or maybe sometimes doubting men are whom He has chosen and tasked to continue His work when He's gone. At that place, “Ἰησοῦς ἐλάλησεν αὐτοῖς λέγων Ἐδόθη μοι πᾶσα ἐξουσία ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς – Jesus preached to them, saying ‘all authority in heaven and on the earth has been given to Me.’”

The verb “λαλέω” here means “to proclaim,” and “ἐξουσία” means “authority.” In the NT, all authority, including earthly authority (Romans 13) finds its genesis and source in God. As we move through the life of Jesus, especially in John's Gospel, we see that in the Kingdom of the Right, authority begins with the Father, and is given to the Son.

Jesus makes no bones about it; The Son has things like power, glory, and authority only from The Father. Now He hands that same authority over to these men. What follows is an articulation of just what kind of authority has been passed on, and how they are to exercise that authority. The eleven are dead, and that authority has been passed on to us.

We see the beginning of this authority transfer in Matthew 9 and 10, where the Apostles are “sent out” with authority to do and say the same things as Jesus does and says. Jesus spoke of that same authority in His High Priestly Prayer in John 17, and we see hear of it in John 20, where He gives the Apostles the authority to “bind and loose” sins.

But before they die, these men – and others – write it down; under inspiration of God, they wrote great portions of the NT. They saw their writings as being the very Word of God, and so do we believe that of those words. And if they are the very Word of God, then those words are without error or contradiction or anything of the sort, and they are.

If you read aloud this sermon Jesus preached, it takes fewer than twenty seconds. We've talked about this concept before; do we really think that Jesus only preached for twenty seconds? More likely, we have a summary of a longer sermon. What would that longer sermon have sounded like? Ideally a lot like the sermon you will preach on Sunday.

It's what we do when we exegete a section of the NT, and then write a sermon based on that exegesis. If you look at it that way, our exegesis is our best effort to squeeze all the meaning we can out of the words that have been passed down to us, condensed. If that's not what you're doing on Sunday morning, then why not just preach the twenty seconds?

19. Now the command from Him to them, “πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη – going therefore and teach all nations.” On Pentecost, people who needed to hear the Word came to The Apostles, who preached Law and Gospel in their own languages. It's how – the means – the Christian religion was passed down then, now, and into the future.

The second verb is not the normal word for “teach.” It is the verb form of the cognate noun “disciple,” and it means a very thorough teaching and training leading to a deeper understanding of the Faith. That sort of teaching in the Early Church took the form of catechesis, rote questions responded to with memorized, rote answers, at least for starters.

These days, Confirmation Class for children lasts for two or more years, and my Adult Class goes for twelve weeks, one hour each week. I do not offer the class to people unless they have been attending Divine Service regularly. That may not sound like much time spent in the classroom, but I deliberately do a lot of teaching in every sermon.

Confirmation is the beginning, and there is no end to becoming a more knowledgeable disciple of Jesus. This is the fourteenth year doing these notes, and I learn new things all the time! I look forward to learning more, and that inclination is very much part and parcel of most of the Christians I know. It’s part and parcel of the very nature of God.

The word for “nations” is ἐθνῇ. It is the etymological root of “ethnic,” and the command is to go to all races, the final indication of something that Jesus has been hammering on His entire ministry; that Gentiles are included in the Kingdom. Not all were keen on the idea at first, but the Council of Jerusalem ruled, and the Church have not looked back.

Martin Luther King, Jr. is the one who said that Sunday morning is the most segregated time in America. Maybe in Alabama. Historically, the Christian church came into a world that was very conscious of ethnicity. Besides the Jewish view of Gentiles, both the Romans and the Greeks considered all others to be Barbarians; different and inferior.

If one asks if the basis of Jew/Gentile conflict in the time of Jesus was religious or racial, the answer would have been “both.” It was also political. There was a special animosity between the Jews and the Samaritans. The Jews considered the Samaritans heretics with impure blood lines, and the Samaritans thought more highly of themselves than that.

For Jesus to speak as He does here about “ἐθνῇ – ethnic groups” was anathema to His countrymen – recall why the home folks in Nazareth were going to toss Him off a cliff. It was because He said that the Kingdom was for Gentiles like Naaman too. The response of the Eleven is not recorded and by this time that concept was probably old hat.

Before the Council of Jerusalem, we often see Jew/Gentile friction in the NT, but the Early Church was truly an ethnic melting pot of every Gentile ἐθνῇ. Think of all the places to which Paul travelled on his three journeys. Now look at the many and various places the Twelve went to see just how open the Christian religion was to all peoples.

We ought to clarify that non-Jews were not necessarily excluded in OT times. But while certain of them had entered through the crack of exception into the OT Church, Jesus has now flung that door wide open to them, and when word of that got out, they streamed through and into the Church. Most of the early converts were Jewish, then the Gentiles.

Modern racism has its philosophical genesis in the Enlightenment, as human reason – of which we are all fans – pushes out Divine Revelation in man's quest to understand God and His Creation. Among especially later "enlightened" thinkers, some races were thought to be simply superior to others, which were thought to be genetically inferior,

The eleventh edition of Encyclopedia Britannica (1910) has the following entry, in part, for the definition of "negro;"

Mentally the negro is inferior to the white...the arrest or even deterioration of mental development [after adolescence] is no doubt very largely due to the fact that after puberty sexual matters take the first place in the negro's life and thoughts."

There's more, a lot more, but you get the idea. When Kipling wrote about "the white man's burden," he was reflecting not only a common, but the prevailing view of his time.

Human zoos sprang up throughout European cities, and the masses flocked to see their specimens, to poke, to look at, and to throw food at, people of varying races from all over the world. For further reading see WIK articles on Scientific Racism and Human Zoos. For further reading regarding Martin Luther's alleged racism, see this online article,

http://qconline.com/archives/qco/print_display.php?id=462653

I'm going to give MLK a pass on his "most segregated hour" comment. He was from Georgia and was a pastor in Montgomery, AL. When my daughter was going to be in Montgomery for a few months, I asked some Lutherans which church she should go to. One of them responded that it should be one of the white churches, not one of the black.

I haven't been able to find confirmation on the Internet, but I'm pretty sure that Jim Crow did not allow southern blacks and whites to go to the same church. Those laws – different in different states – prohibited a lot less personal interaction between the races than going to church, which is a very personal thing, and a good place to find a spouse.

The Church makes disciples by teaching – and by baptizing, a present active participle. Go ahead and expound upon the wonderful Gospel that is the Sacrament of Baptism. Maybe a review of the four questions in the Catechism would be in order, or at least hit the issues addressed in the Catechism, which are the issues we need to address today.

The meaning of "name" in that day meant a lot more than it does these days. Perhaps that's why faithless or ignorant pastors these days take such liberties with the words

given to us to be used to Baptize, an issue not addressed in Luther's Catechism, because who would have thought that people would actually commit such a crass act of sacrilege.

It's probably been fifteen years since we went to that LCMS church in Iowa West while on vacation. The sign said "alternative service" at 10:30, which we took to be Matins, but it wasn't. Some rather odd Stuff happened in that sanctuary on that day, including an infant being brought to the front, and the pastor putting some water on that infant's head.

As he did that, he said, "I baptize you in the name of the parent, the child, and the spirit." Are you kidding me? Was it a valid Baptism? Every time I ask anybody, they all say no. You have taken a thing that one should be able to point to with certainty as the time and place when you were given all the benefits connected Baptism and made it uncertainty.

20. Now the more common word for teaching "διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν – teaching them to do whatever things I have commanded you." God gave us each a brain, and nobody is baptized – nobody becomes a disciple – in a vacuum. Teaching and learning about God and man is part and parcel of the Christian religion.

Compare and contrast other religions who do not want their people to know more about their god(s) or about man. You may get an idea of which religions I'm talking about by looking at a map or graph that compares worldwide literacy rates. Have you heard of Boko Haram? Did you know "Boko Haram" means "western education is forbidden."

The things we are to teach to those who learn are all the things Jesus had taught them, and we in our time pass those things on to those who follow us. It means to teach factual things about Jesus and His religion, and it means to proclaim the Law and the Gospel. For the Pastor, it means to shepherd the flock along in their walk along The Way.

Jesus offers this final assurance to these men – and they are going to need it – that "ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος – I am with you to the end of eternity" The verb of being is a present indicative active – indicating that this is the way it is. The last word assures us that this promise of His presence will never end.

Logic is the science of correct thinking, and one of the ways that humans think correctly is to distinguish and categorize. It's something we do without even thinking about it. Sometimes we compel ourselves or are compelled by another to do distinguish and categorize. Distinguish between the different kinds of "with you" that Jesus offers us.

God is not everything (pantheism), but God is everywhere (Christianity), and Jesus is with us always and everywhere. God – in the person of Jesus – was with those men at that time and place in a very localized and physical way, until He ascended into heaven. After the Ascension, He is still present, but not in that same physical and localized way.

The child who says that "Jesus lives in my heart" is not wrong, and if the Christian sees the pastor standing "in the stead" of Jesus as he pronounces Absolution, he is likewise

correct. But if you want to see the most certain and concrete presence of Jesus among us, the primary meaning of “lo, I am with you always,” look to the Sacrament of the Altar.

It’s what we mean by “real presence,” and it’s why we make a big deal of the Sacrament. Besides that, presence being a profound truth in and of itself, there are implications for that truth. I will maybe ask what your posture would be were your favorite President or famous person coming to be really present with you, and then let them fill in the blanks.

Law/Gospel

False gods/True God – Most of the world has invented and attached themselves to false gods. If you don’t know the true God, then you will invent one, and the world does. How blessed are we that the One True God has chosen us. Why has He chosen me? That’s another one of those things that I don’t know, but I am glad that He did. Go ahead and rejoice, Christians, that by God’s grace you are a Christian.

No Baptism/Baptism – If you look at what the Bible says, there are a lot of good things going on in Baptism. Without Baptism, you are missing out on those good things. Parents who want the best for their children will want them to receive those good things, and an adult who becomes a Christian will likewise want them.

Proclaimer/Proclaimee – The Law commands us to go and proclaim the Gospel. The Gospel is that we have had the Gospel proclaimed to us, faith has been worked in us, and we are saved. I have, in the past, from the pulpit expressed gratitude for the many people that God has sent into my life to proclaim the Gospel to me, starting with my parents and continuing to this day with many individuals. It makes it personal.

Sermon Titles

Christian Baptism

One God, Three Persons

The Presence of God

Hymns

Holy, Holy, Holy – LSB 507

All People That on Earth Do Dwell – 791

The Lord, My God, Be Praised – LSB 794

Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee - 803

Praise God, From Whom All Blessings Flow - 805

From All That Dwell Below the Skies – LSB 816

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, Iowa

Resources

ACC – Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Matthew)*.
Intervarsity Press, 2002

BAG – Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by
William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1979

BCLY – William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*. The Westminster Press, 1975

FGG – James W. Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar*. Concordia Publishing House,
1993

GBS – Jeffrey Gibbs, *Concordia Commentary, Matthew*, CPH, 2006

GND – Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*,
Eerdmans, 1982

MGM – W.F. Moulton, A.S. Geden, H.K. Moulton, *A Concordance to the Greek
Testament*. T & T Clark LTD., 1978

MM – James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek
Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982

ODCC – F.L. Cross, Editor, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford
University Press, 1978

RNK – Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1976

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

SCR – David Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew: Jesus Teaches the Church*, CPH, 2004

UBD – Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, 1977.

WP – A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Baker, 1930

VINE – W.E.Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984

WIK – www.wikipedia.com

BIB – www.biblos.com

GBO – www.greekbible.com

Digital Classics Library - www.perseus.tufts.edu

Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html