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Tyler Callum

Acts 3.1-21

Galatians 4.4-6

Today is Trinity Sunday, it is one of those transitional Sundays that are sprinkled throughout the Church calendar before the start a new season or at the end of an old season. Christ the King comes before Advent, Transfiguration Sunday comes before Lent, Baptism of the Lord comes after Christmas, and Trinity Sunday comes at the end of Easter. Since the Trinity is something that is notoriously difficult to talk about and something that does not always keep people's attention, I thought of skipping Trinity Sunday entirely. But what fun would that be?

As we enter our text from Acts this morning, the disciples have just gone through the excitement of Pentecost, receiving the Holy Spirit. They were pushed out of the upper room, into the world that was waiting to hear some good news, and through the power of the Holy Spirit they brought three thousand people into the newly formed Church. One day as Peter and John were going to the Temple to pray when they came upon a man who was lame from birth, who has been sitting at this gate begging for quite some time. We are not given his name, it is as if his identity has been completely consumed by the title "beggar". As the two pass by, they look intently at him, and then Peter tells the beggar, "look at me". So now instead of being just a beggar that no one makes eye contact with, instead of just being another hand that may have a few coins, they are both people, they are in relationship with one another, they are in community. We are not sure if this man expected or wanted this to happen, he probably didn't. He is sitting at the gates of the Temple before afternoon prayers, because religious people have always been

easy marks. He probably expects Peter to just keep the line moving. He is part of a society that has taught him to lower his expectations, which constantly tells him that the best he can hope for is to be a good beggar. Likewise we find ourselves in a society that is constantly telling us to lower our expectations, we are all begging God for just enough, just enough grace to get me through the day, just enough of a community to keep me going. But that is not how the Triune God works, that is not what we get by calling on the name of our God. God is never interested in just enough, God has no patience for our lower expectations.

Peter tells the beggar that he has no gold or silver, but what he does have, he gives to him freely, in the name of Jesus Christ. Peter lifts this man up and together they go into the Temple to praise God, this man leaping all the way. As this man clung to Peter and John, crowds formed amazed at what had happened. Peter, tells the people that this happened through the God of their ancestors, through Jesus the Christ, through the Holy Spirit, by the power of these names we are able to lift people off their feet, transform them from being beggars who expect only just enough. Only by the power of the God, the power which acts by simply invoking God's name, was this man healed. But as wonderful as these stories of physical healing are, we know that eventually all the people that were healed got sick again, and died, so if the physical healing was the point these healings only prolonged the inevitable. If physical healing was the point they are only ever a temporary solution. The point was and always has been to say, open your eyes, there is holiness in your midst, who knows what might happen. When your eyes are opened to God the Father, God Jesus Christ, God the Holy Spirit, you can rise from being a beggar and worship, leaping all the way.

But as anyone who has tried to understand the Trinity knows, having your eyes opened to see the God who is in unity and trinity, is no easy task. One of the difficulties in speaking about

the Trinity is that it is a balancing act, if you oversell the unity of God or the distinctiveness of each person, you quickly find yourself in the midst of heresy. Which is a place that no one wants to be. Some of these heresies are historical and some only come into existence from analogies. Sadly these analogies too often are the first or only explanation that we hear. We have all heard them, and while they can be tempting in describing the indescribable using simple analogies, they always fall short. So before we go any further let us look at a few of these analogies.

If you try to describe Trinity like water, which appears in three different forms, liquid, ice and steam, or you describe God as a man who can be a father, son, and husband you have unfortunately fallen into Modalism. By describing the Trinity in this way you inadvertently reject the distinctiveness of the three persons of the Trinity, and instead turn them into three different modes of God's appearing. Behind these modes of appearing, God remained far off and hidden, completely unknowable. By placing too much emphasis on the unity of God, you have denied the uniqueness of each Person, and turned each into a specific form of revelation to us, which never reveals God to us. God remains as someone in different masks, where you know the identity that is revealed but never to who is behind the mask. Within Modalism you find yourself unable to describe the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, because they only exist as one divine reality acting in different ways. But to your defense, you are able to maintain the Godhood and Lordship of Jesus, so at least you have that going for you. From Modalism you are only a hop, skip and a jump away from Patripassianism, where because the Persons of the Trinity are so conflated there is no distinction between the Father and the Son. So that the Father becomes the one who suffered and died on the cross, in His human mode as Jesus. Well, let's see how the next analogy fairs.

If you describe the Trinity as the sun, which produces heat and light, then you have unfortunately fallen into the heresy of Arianism. Where the heat and light, or in this case the Son and the Holy Spirit are not God but merely creations of God. Within this analogy you accidentally deny the divinity of Jesus and the Holy Spirit because they cannot be divine, or of the same substance or nature as the Father, if they are mere creations. There is no way to describe them as unified in any meaningful way. So that analogy fails no better.

Finally my personal favorite is St. Patrick's clover. Sorry Pat, you were so close. If the clover is God, then each leaf or each Person is only part of the Godhead. So by encountering any part of it you would only know a part of God and could not describe the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit as God properly but only part of something larger which is God. While this maintains some unity and some distinctiveness of each person, ultimately it does not describe the Trinity.

The Trinity is indeed something that is difficult to describe, when these analogies fail us and we attempt to look at the Biblical witness, we can remain just as confused. It is true that nowhere in the Bible do we find the term Trinity, which has led some to claim that it does not exist. But we clearly find all three interacting in unique ways with creation and with each other. Biblical language concerning the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has led others to assume there is a hierarchy within the Trinity that the Father rules and commands the Son and the Holy Spirit, sending both into the world. But that would leave us with us with three Persons that are not equal, but two that are subordinate to the Father. Two Persons that are only being commanded by the Father's will, who are subject to what the Father desires.

Between this and the apparent disconnect that theology surrounding the Trinity can have with the lives of believers, it is no wonder that so many just throw their hands in the air and give up. And I understand the temptation to relegate the Trinity to a position that is unimportant,

because it is so difficult. But it is so vitally important to our Church life, there is no Gospel message without the Trinity. By the very name of the Trinity we are baptized into the Church, by the name of the Trinity we are lifted up from a life of low expectations. It is by the name and power of the Trinity that all of our work is given meaning. That is how central and how important it is within the life of the Church, it is exactly what gives life to the waters of baptism, it is what gives life to our proclamation of hope at funerals, it is what gives life to our congregation. It is the power by which the Church calls to all who beg, and lifts them up so they can leap in worship.

At this point you must be wondering, do you actually have anything helpful to say, and the answer is I sure hope so. I believe the best way to understand the Trinity is as one subject, with three modes of being. Not three modes of appearing, but three modes of being, each of which is fully God, not in part, but with nothing left behind, and differentiated by the will of the one subject. It is an eternal act of God to exist in the three modes of the one subject, meaning that there is no hierarchy within the three, none exist as a creation, and all three exist eternally. God exists in Trinity because God as one subject has willed to exist in three different modes of appearing. Three different modes that are differentiated from each other but remain in unity being of the same one subject. All three can properly be called God individually and as a whole, without any reservations, and without anything hidden behind the Persons that we know.

Within this framework the generation or sending of the Son language that we find within Galatians and elsewhere is God eternally preparing Himself to exist in humiliation, to become incarnate, to exist in a mode that is headed towards the cross. The Son is generated and sent as an act of eternal self-humiliation, self-humbling for the sake of human redemption. And so it is with the Spirit. God's very being in Trinity is an act that is for us, and for our redemption. In the three

modes of appearing we find three distinct Persons, with distinct attributes, which act for us, all while remaining unified, while we may look upon all and call them Lord and God. And we may declare with confidence as we go to a world full of beggars that the God we call upon, the God who exists in Trinity and unity is the God we know, the God who in all three modes of being is known to us by the love that He pours out, the God that we know through the undeniable will to bring humanity close to Himself. The God whose existence in Trinity is an act of incredible love, electing Himself to be a God who is completely for the love of His creation. The God who is in all ways working in three modes of being so that we may all hope for the universal restoration promised by Peter. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, we go into the world with nothing more. Amen.