

A Cord of Three Strands

John 3:1-17

June 15, 2014 SOH Trinity Sunday/Father's Day

Theme: Understanding the Trinity

When we pray, God wants us to be simple and straightforward in our manner; "Lord, surprise us." He wants to hear from us. Not every concept of God is so simple though. Take the notion of the Trinity, it is foundational to our faith, it defines us as believers and yet probably none of us truly understands the concept or even begin to realize how it works in the world.

There are some today who want to re-interpret the notion of the Trinity into more of a theoretical concept rather than consider it any sort of a physical reality. For them, Jesus is nothing more than a Jewish carpenter who exceeded expectations and managed, through his unorthodox teaching, to get himself on the wrong side of nearly every teacher of the law and rabbi around, and ultimately wound up on the cross.

For these thinkers, the resurrection is merely theoretical and only within each of us. The notion that Jesus was truly divine is simply silly and consequently any worship of Jesus is nonsense. These comments are a simplification of this understanding, but don't be disillusioned, this is an old thinking that cropped up some three hundred years after Jesus in the so-called Gnostic teachings and continues to appear in some circles near the

church. In order to arrive at this line of thinking, one has to disregard much of what is contained in the book of John who focused his writing on the sayings of Jesus about himself and on his relationships.

There is insufficient time to talk about the reliability of John today, so I will assume that we can agree it is an accurate representation of Jesus' life with the disciples and his sayings if not completely verbatim. With that in mind, let's take a look at today's text.

Nicodemus, the Pharisee and member of the ruling council, comes to see Jesus in the dark of night. He was supposed to be the teacher, the authority in all things religious yet he comes to see this "man" Jesus who has been teaching new things. Nicodemus becomes Jesus' one ally on the council, one who he would describe as being "close to the kingdom" as he continued to learn. Not all Pharisees were opposed to Jesus teaching.

Jesus tells him about the need to be "born again" of water and spirit that this new birth is from above and not of an earthly nature. As Nicodemus tries to understand this, Jesus continues teaching and testifies about himself and here we see an interesting viewpoint about his relationship to God.

Jesus referred to himself as the "Son of Man" numerous times as recorded in the gospels-88 times to be exact. It is a rather enigmatic phrase that we understand to be a direct reference to Daniel 7:13-14 which prophesies

about the coming Messiah, the one who will save,” as being, “...**one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven.**” It is a Messianic title and another reason the rulers and leaders of the temple hated Jesus and declared his blasphemy of God.

Over and over, Jesus declares himself to be this one long ago prophesied to come and save the people from their own destruction and that this was to be extended to the whole world. In verse 13 he says, “**No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.**”

Then we get to the relationship part. Verse 16 – ya’ll know verse 16 don’t you? “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have everlasting life.” Let’s note that the pronoun ‘him’ in “believes in him” is referring to Jesus. It is our belief in Jesus that assures us of everlasting life. Certainly belief in God, but the belief in Jesus, this tangible, visible, presence of the creator of the universe is the one whom we are able to connect with and through to God.

Verse 17 reminds us, in case we’ve forgotten, that God does not want to condemn the world but rather save it. It’s his creation, it’s his desire to see it restored to the world described at the beginning of the Adam and Eve account – a world that is “Good”!

In Matthew 28:16-20, the Great Commission quotes Jesus saying, “**All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**” “**Therefore go,**” Jesus continues, “**and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**”

Yes, this is the only place in the Bible where this formula is spelled out so clearly. So what is the importance of this relationship and how does Jesus fit in? First we can talk about God as a person because he made man in his image and we are all persons of God’s image. Thinking in such a way helps us to comprehend how vast God truly is. Second, we talk about Jesus as a person because he was “made flesh and dwelt among us” a phrase that indicates his divine origin yet fully flesh and blood. The Holy Spirit is never described as a person but rather coming out of or from God, the very essence and presence of God.

Many of us grew up repeating the Apostles Creed or the Nicene Creed. Both claim the notion of the Trinity and Christ’s redeeming action on the cross. The Apostle’s creed may date as early as the year 180, just a few years after the last gospel and letter that we have in the Bible. The Nicene Creed, written in 325 was a response by the church to counter beliefs declaring, in part, that Jesus was holder to a secret but he was just a man. The creed affirmed what the church had believed for nearly 300 years.

C.S. Lewis, a former Atheist, wrote this about Jesus in “Mere Christianity,”

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

The Trinity, this God in three persons, three entities, who cooperate together, to will and to work the desire of the Creator, our Father. There are terrific fathers here on earth that mirror God’s image more perfectly, though some fathers are not able to do that. We still celebrate Father’s Day with the assurance of the Hope of the Father who will never fail, who will always love, always forgive, always honor you who are created in his image. How could he not love you?

Like the Strand of Three Cords of Ecclesiastes 4:12, one is quickly broken, two might stand for a while, but three together are not quickly broken. Stand with God and you add a fourth. Stand with God and the church and who can stand against you.