

Prayer of the Day:

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Verse of the Day:

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Sermon Text:

It's Trinity Weekend here at St. Paul's. This is a weekend on which our lectionary asks us to contemplate the rich truths of the Holy Trinity. We began with the traditional recitation of the Athanasian Creed. Athanasius was the church father who locked horns with Arius and Arianism which denied the Trinity and the two natures of Christ. All of our lessons gave us clues that our God is three persons but the one and only God all at the same time. The first lesson from Genesis showed us the Father, the powerful Word which John will later tell us is none other than the pre-incarnate Christ, and the Spirit hovering over the waters. As they made man the divine conversation announced it as well, *"Let Us make man in Our Image, in Our Likeness."* In the Gospel lesson, Jesus instituted Baptism *"in the name (singular) of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."* Finally, that Second Lesson, the one we will dwell on for a moment in worship now, gave us the Apostolic Blessing so often spoken in worship which, we will see, announces the Trinity in Unity once again. And so, without further ado, Let's rejoice in our **Triune God** who is all about us, who is all **for you!**

Perhaps before we get to the blessing it would be good at least for a moment to dwell on Paul's final words to the Corinthians. Corinth has seen its fair share of trouble and turmoil. Paul has spoken about the divisions that have crept into the congregation, *"I follow Paul! I follow Apollos!"* (1 Corinthians 1:12) etc." He has dealt with the so-called super-apostles. Even the rich looked down on the poor and separated from them at the Lord's Supper. Persecution had made its way to the congregation as well, as had doubt about the resurrection of all believers. Paul had methodically dealt with it all and now he says, *Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints send their greetings.*

You can hear Paul's apostolic concern for all we mentioned even in these words he leaves them with. But perhaps one phrase jumps out at you as it does to me. As Paul says goodbye, He says *"Aim for perfection."* Now that's a pretty tall order right?! I wonder if as we hear the Gospel we sometimes begin to think to ourselves that God will be happy with us as long as we try hard. We perhaps think "It'll be okay if I continue to sin because, well, Jesus took care of all of that for me." Paul once told the Romans, *"What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? ² By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? ³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.* (Romans 6:1-4)" Far be it from us to use the grace of God like a license for our sinfulness. Jesus died to save us from the consequences of sin so that we would be free to live for Him, in thanks to Him. He did not die so that we could return to the filth of our sin. So Paul says, *Aim for perfection.* Oh for sure we will struggle to hit it, but the very fact that God has showered us in His love will be motivation enough to strive for what we know we, on our own, will never achieve.

This becomes the setting in which the words of the Apostolic Blessing are then written. And, as we hear the comfort and receive the strength to live each day for God, well, we also see our Triune God at work for us. Let's start in the middle of these well-known words.

Text: 2 Corinthians 13:11-14

¹¹ Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹² Greet one another with a holy kiss. ¹³ All the saints send their greetings. ¹⁴ May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. – NIV84

May ... the love of God ... be with you all. Jesus and the Spirit are mentioned by their triune names. The Father is referred to simply as God. Perhaps because His divinity is seldom questioned in this world of ours. But note the word that is associated with Him, “love.” At the risk of stealing thunder from next week’s sermon, this is what a Father does. He loves his children. Scripture is full of this kind of language for our God and we quickly see why. The best known of all Bible passages proclaims, “*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.* (John 3:16-17)” Or consider the words of 1 John chapter 4, ⁷ *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.* ⁸ *Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.* ⁹ *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.* ¹⁰ *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* ¹¹ *Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.* ¹² *No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.* (1 John 4:7-12)” The Father’s love is unfathomable, unthinkable, unbelievable (we’ll come back to that one in a moment!). The Father so loved You that even when our saving meant His Son’s dying, He did it! Which child would you give up? 1 John 3:1 announces, *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!* God will not give you up any more than you would give up your child. Even when it means the very life and blood of Jesus Himself.

Ah but then we get ahead of ourselves. *May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ ... be with you all.* Grace is the undeserved love of God for sinners, sinners like us. Because I can only aim at perfection on my own, because I will, by myself always miss the mark which God has set, that is what I am, a sinner. And *the soul who sins is the one who will die* (Ezekiel 18:20). The truth is inescapable. I deserve nothing from God who demands perfection because even on my best day I fall far short. I sin. So, I deserve the fire, the agony of hell. But God gives grace instead, solely because of the work of Jesus Christ in my place. In my imperfection, He is my righteousness! In my sin, He is my salvation! On the cross, He takes away all that is wrong with me and grants all that the Father would see in me so that His reward is my own. This is the glory of grace. This is the glory of the cross. This is the glory of Christ Jesus. Through His work and none of my own I am saved!

Every time I hear the apostolic blessing the first two statements erupt with meaning but if I’m honest the last one has always struck me as a little weird. *The fellowship of the Holy Spirit ... be with you all.* The Father gets love, the Son gets grace, the Holy Spirit ... Fellowship! Seems to pale in comparison to the other two, no? Ah, but then we ask the question, “What is fellowship?” A friendly association with like-minded people. The status of colleague or fellow. A group of people with whom we are united, one. Yes, all of them and here all at once.

But just as in the Supper of our Lord Christian fellowship is always two-fold. The Spirit makes us one with God and joins us in fellowship with Him through that precious gift of faith which connects us to the grace of Christ and the love of the Father. In Baptism for most, He wings His gift into our hearts so that we can be heirs of all the amazing gifts that Christ has won. Through Word and Supper, He strengthens it so that we might remain children of God for all eternity.

But even as we connected to our Triune God by faith, so also we are united with one another in the very same gift. Heirs of heaven we are now brothers and sisters, one holy and united family, “a holy Christian Church and a Communion of Saints” to borrow terminology from the Apostles Creed. Worldly worthlessness need not separate or divide us. Selfishness and greed need not tear the Church apart. Together united with each other and most importantly united with God we even find reason and strength to strive for perfection, living for God and in accordance with His commands in thanksgiving for the grace and love, the fellowship which He has granted. And when we fall, and sin will still rear its ugly head from time to time, the Spirit will move us to encourage one another and all the more as we see the day approaching.

Ah, yes, it’s Trinity Weekend here at St. Paul’s. This is a weekend we contemplate the rich truths of the Holy Trinity. It’s a truth that does boggle my mind as I try to wrap my feeble reason around it. But it is a truth through which our God once again cements all truth, even as He embeds it in himself. Though reason may not comprehend it, I thank God for it because as I contemplate the holy Trinity, I once more am reminded that I am saved and that all I need has been provided. Yes, our **Triune God** is all about us, all **for you!** Amen!