

Sermon - May 26, 2024 - The Holy Trinity Pastor Ventura
What Matters Most John 3:1-7

Dear friends in Christ, grace and peace from the Triune God to you all.

I have a question this morning, what is it that matters most? Well, it depends on your interest and your stage in life I suppose, right? so goes your answer. But when it comes to faith matters, it matters the most who is it you are trusting, following, and worshiping.

Answering the right question about the who, will make a difference, and that difference is a difference of life and death. Thankfully, the one who has gathered us this morning, and is here to minister, to serve us, is the True Triune God. Triune because he manifests himself in three Persons, The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

This is what the Athanasian Creed we have confessed so far, is all about, and as the creed goes: "Whoever desires to be saved must... hold the faith. Must keep it whole and undefiled, and this faith is: that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the substance. For the Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Holy Spirit is another. But the Godhead of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal." This is what we believe, teach, and confess. So, in whom you believe, and trust matters most.

Sometime ago I met a lady who was excited about some news she had, let's call her Mary. Mary said "Jesus send me a message, can you believe it?" She asked. The message said: "Hi Mary, this is Jesus, just to let you know that the grass on your front yard is getting dry, it needs water." A second message came in... "by the way, just want to say you are such a wonderful person, always helping others." She asked again, do you believe it, Jesus sent me a message. Now, how about you? If she asked you this morning, would you believe it? Do you believe that Mary indeed got a message from Jesus? Her excitement was so great that it seemed to be a very special message, from a special being. When she asked me if I believed it, I said, I do believe you got a message. But who is Jesus? Well, she said, he is a wonderful guy, he is my gardener!

The message might be good, even out of this world, but who is sending it really matters. It matters knowing who is sending you messages! Doesn't it?

So, it does matter knowing who is it that is speaking in our Gospel lesson for today. The One speaking with Nicodemus is Jesus, he is from God, he is God, working together with the Holy Spirit.

This is what the Athanasian Creed confesses. This creed, was put together by Christians who in the 4th century faced the errors and false claims about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit and their relationship with each other, they stood together and asked the question who is God, who is Jesus and who is the Holy Spirit, and most importantly answering the question, what does the Trinity, what does knowing the Trinity has to do with us. How does it affect us? And does it matter?

And it does matter deeply because the Trinity is at the center of our faith. It affects our view of God, and God's view and purpose for us. It is hard sometimes to see the whole truth though, because of all the misunderstandings and false teachings out there.

Even the Jews didn't have it clear. Nicodemus who was a doctor in theology of his time, didn't know who Jesus was, for him was a good Rabbi, recognized him coming from God, but... he missed how the Triune God works. How the Holy Trinity works.

Now, this talk of doctrine and Trinity, is a religious language, that we might not be so interested in, or it could be so foreign to us that turns out attention away from its truth. But we must hold on to the truth of God's nature and how He works with us, otherwise, you might confuse the True Jesus with Jesus the gardener. And what good could that be, besides having a good and lush garden?

Look around, tune your ears to what you hear out there. Muslims argue Jesus was a prophet only. Now yes, true he was a prophet but not just a prophet. He is God in the flesh coming to us. Jehovah Witness, argue that Jesus is a small god, a created being, a little better than us, but still a

created being. But does it matter if we get who God is? Doesn't the knowledge of a Superior Being, be enough? Well, it does, we might think Jesus the gardener is of divine origin.

Yes, but... does it matter what you believe? If you are sincere in what you believe and that you are a good person, isn't that good enough? We ask. But, does that kind of thinking even make sense?

Think about this, sincere believe doesn't take us far. Picture this, I'm driving a 150 kilometres on the way to Edmonton, what if I say: 'Well, I sincerely believe that it doesn't matter! It's my right and my freedom!' Now I wonder however, if the RCMP would think that it doesn't matter?! Or take this popular one: "I believe that all religions are just different paths to God." But is this really so? After all, contrast those popular statements and common ideas with what the Athanasian Creed confesses: "Whoever desires to be saved must believe" . . . believe in "One God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity. Equal in glory and majesty. Uncreated, infinite, eternal, almighty. The Son not created but begotten. The Holy Spirit neither created nor begotten but proceeding." And further: "Jesus Christ at the same time both God and man, who suffered for our salvation, rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and will come to judge the living and the dead."

That's what we confess. That's what we believe. And it matters! It matters because at the center of it all, is God's nature, which is love. Knowing God we know love, because he is love. And when the Athanasian Creed says "whoever desires to be saved must believe" this; it says that not because you have to pass a test and have all the right knowledge in order to get into heaven – although that's probably how it sounds sometimes. No, it matters because to know God aright is to know His love for you . . . to know that in love God died for you. Jesus says: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

The Christian faith, you see, isn't about good people doing good things in good ways in order to have a good life. Instead, it's about God, who alone is good, dying on a cross of all things for no-good sinners. It's about a loving God doing good things for unlovable people. More specifically, it's about God the Father giving His own Son into death as the payment price for the sins of the entire world, and who then gives the Holy Spirit to join us to Himself both now and forever. That's who God is and that's what God does. The two go together. And you either have both, or you have neither. So, St. John puts it in his First Epistle: "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 4:10)

My father didn't pay for my sins, although his name is Jesus. Jesus the gardener didn't pay for Mary's sins, although his name was Jesus. So, it matters to know who are believing in, who you are trusting and worshipping.

Does it matter that we know and understand who this Jesus is, and what the Trinity does for us? Of course it matters. It is in the name of the Trinity that little Marcus is going to be baptized today, and we don't take that lightly.

But thankfully, the Scriptures reveals it to us. As explained in our Lutheran Confessions: "God is one divine essence. . . . Yet there are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. . . . These three persons are of the same essence and power" (AC I 2-3).

The sole purpose of his revelation in Three persons, is for our benefit, our salvation, our future. Knowing in whose name we gather today, knowing in whose name little Marcus is going to be baptized this morning, is very important.

That's why in a day like this it becomes important to remind ourselves who Jesus is, and He is the Son of God, who is both God and man. It's a mystery that cannot fathom, for sure, but doesn't mean that we don't benefit from the work each person of the Trinity does. The Father is the Creator, the Son the redeemer and the Holy Spirit the councillor and comforter. This is not our invention or the product of our imagination, rather it is the truth and we are only receiving it. Nothing less, nothing more!

And this truth is grasped and retained in our hearts only by the power of the Holy Spirit, as God the Father has planned it to be. And more it is by the working of the Holy Spirit that we know the way to the Father. It is the Holy Spirit that shows our corrupted and sinful nature, but also the need for repentance, restoration and renewal.

And if God only loves us when we are good? . . . well, that matters. Does it matter to think that there are many ways to get to heaven and the Son of God did not really have to become one of us in order to die in our place on a cross? Yes it does. None of that is truth. The truth is that it is God who desired to save us, because he does love us. From eternity his nature is love, and wants to love us into eternity. For that he must send His eternal, only-begotten Son into our flesh to accomplish this by dying Himself. And in that love he send his Spirit by means of His Word to give to us personally the blessings of what happened there on the cross and to be with us and comfort us through all the trials and troubles and tragedies of life. So, so yes, it matters to know aright... and not just the facts about God – Three in One and One in Three and all that; but what God has done for us on a cross at a real time and a real place in the course of history. For, there, God shows His great love for us sinners. There, God shows that He will never leave us or forsake us, no matter how bad things get. And that matters! In fact, that was the plan of God from before the foundation of the world. It's who God is and what God does.

Come what may come, even death, his love stands and covers us. That you have been baptized into the name of The Holy Trinity who has defeated death and the grave for you keeps you secure unto life eternal.

That love, God's love, also keeps you at the face of trials and tumults and tribulations we face in this world. That love keeps you through even when all your sins and failures and shortcomings cause you to be afraid of standing before the judgment seat of the Lord and Creator of all on the Last Day. Even now through the Holy Spirit, through his word, he tells you: "I forgive you all your sins. If anyone abides in My Word, he will never see death."

Here and now, at all times and in all places, wherever this Word is received, believed, taught, and confessed, the Word of Love comes. And it comes for all, for all people. . . including you and me; not just for a select few, all because God's love in His Son is meant for everyone! Yes, God for you . . . God with you . . . God in you. The Trinity in Unity and Unity in Trinity.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit! Amen.