

June 15 2014

**Scripture Lessons ~**

*Psalm 8*

*2 Corinthians 13: 11-13*

*John 3:1-17*

**Sermon**

*God In Three Persons*

Well, as Sandee described, Nicodemus came to Jesus under the cover of darkness, his friends and associates had some pretty serious questions concerning this Jesus. Nicodemus, the one who came also had questions of his own but he was really impressed by the miraculous signs which were a central part of Jesus' ministry. So he felt compelled to speak face to face with this Jesus. Nicodemus begins this conversation in John's Gospel by affirming that Jesus must be a teacher who comes from God because of all these wonderful things that he was doing. But Jesus immediately interrupts him to point out to Nicodemus that what really matters is that a person must be born again. He also speaks of the Kingdom of God and the working of the Holy Spirit to bring all of this about. And the man who came to Jesus with questions as a result of a conversation only found his questions multiplying and multiplying however. And I think if we had been there we probably could have heard the frustration in Nicodemus' voice and maybe even we would echo that same frustration when he asked that question. "How in the world can any of this be?"

So on this Trinity Sunday we contemplate this profound mystery; the mystery of God in three persons. Is not that also our question today as well? We believe in one God but as Christian people, we have been told that one God is Father and Son and Holy Spirit. If that reality not causes us ask along with Nicodemus; "How in the world can this be? If so then it may be comforting to realize that you and I are not the first by any means to question these things in the history of the church. Our mothers and fathers in the faith also struggled with all of these same issues and out of their deliberations that this serious doctrine of the trinity was formed. This was their way of putting into words the mysteries of God which many had somehow already experienced in the midst of their lives of faith. And what they believed was this first and foremost they believed in the worship of one God. They believed this intensely there was no room for compromise on this one point. One ultimately reality stands behind all of creation and that reality alone is holy and that reality is worthy of our worship and that reality alone is our God. And the classic Jewish confession of faith comes to this conclusion and is called the Shema. Shema is a Hebrew word meaning - listen. Hear this. The devote

person were to recite the Shema two times per day morning and evening from Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 4 and goes like this: "Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one." And this confession is just as important for the church as it was for Israel. Jesus himself made it clear in Mark's Gospel when he tells us that a teacher of the law came to him to ask this question "Of all the commandments which one is the most important". The most important one, answered Jesus, is this, and he repeats the Shema. "Hear O Israel: The Lord our God is one and he adds to it. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul with your all your mind and with all your strength" The church then had a clear word from Jesus in this matter as well. We worship the one God and yet the church also had the words of the New Testament; the words which claimed and exalted the position and authority for Jesus as well. The church had its own confession of faith that being Jesus is Lord. So you can see the problem that the ancient church had to deal with; how could both God and Jesus somehow be Lord and if that weren't enough of a problem the Holy Spirit was thrown into the debate and the stage is now set for this formation of the doctrine of the trinity. So the church struggled and the councils met and in the end is what they said very simply. First they agree as we motioned before that God is one, secondly, the Creator is God, the Son is God and the Holy Spirit is God and that is it. I hope that Maxine brought good refreshments because I am going to quit right now.

But no at the same time it is mysterious and as is profound of all of that as well. The very best theological minds have come together and soon they realized that they had were at a completely loss as how to explain God so what they did then was in fact was to preserve the mystery of God while at the same time they affirmed that Christian experience that God is Father, God is Son and God as Holy Spirit. In essence they put their experience into words they formed what is called doctrine or system of belief about this subject; but the words of the doctrine have somehow been under gridded by reality of a spiritual experience. So the doctrine of the trinity is an expression of that Christian experience. It was the experience of many of Christians in the early church. It is something that many of us experience as Christians in this day as well. It is the experience that Jesus wanted Nicodemus to know and understand as a part of his life, too.

Jesus' words in the text for today pointed out that this Trinitarian experience of God. First of all Jesus speaks to the Nicodemus of the necessity of being born from above in order to enter the kingdom of God and he points to the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing about this new birth in our lives; the Holy Spirit is the presence and power of God alive and active in the world. I tell my confirmation classes the easiest way to say it, God in action amongst us today. The spirit is of course, unpredictable as the wind but nevertheless the spirit moves through our lives reminding us of our own humanity, of our own shortcomings, of our

need for God in our lives. God's spirit enables us to understand God's will for our lives and gives us the strength to presume God's will. We know that God is ever present with us as when we grow in likeness in the example of Jesus because of God's Holy Spirit. So through Nicodemus, Jesus was in a way issuing a call to all of us to be open to what the Holy Spirit may desire to do in and through us in our daily walk with Jesus.

But then Jesus further explains his own purpose for coming into the world as his redemptive work as Son of God.

He reminds Nicodemus about that strange Old Testament event that Sandy shared with us a little bit earlier and is recorded in Numbers chapter 21 serving as an indicator of Jesus' reconciling work. It is a kind of obscure passage. Moses lifted up the serpents in the wilderness and so must the Son of Man be lifted up and whosoever believes in him may have eternal life. A little bit of history. As God's people wandered in the desert during the time of Exodus, they grew impatient and started to speak against God and against Moses and as a result poisonous snakes came amongst them. Many died as a result of the snake bites but those who looked in faith at that bronze snake that Moses was placed at the top of the pole somehow lived. So to those who looked in faith to Jesus will be saved; saved from the aimless of life without God and share in the abundance life with God in our lives. Let us not forget, however, it was the same eternal God who Jesus addressed as Father and invited each of us to do the same and gave his Son as the ultimate example of what it means to live sacrificially in this world because of God's love for us because of God's desire for communion with us. John 3:16 tells us that God gave to us his own begotten Son that in him we may find forgiveness. We may find eternal life.

Jesus didn't die on the cross to appease an angry God instead Jesus died to serve as God's extreme expression of forgiving love to all people. God was in Jesus Christ for the purpose of reconciling the world to himself. Paul says to us in 2 Corinthians to bring us into a loving relationship with God, God the creator lovingly sent to us God the Son who gave his life that each one of us. God the Spirit works in our lives today then to somehow enable us to somehow understand our need of Jesus example through which we can know that love and forgiveness of God. It is all the work of God. It is all the work of one God known to us as Father and Son and Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the trinity, of course, continues to be a profound mystery which nevertheless reflects a very personal experience of God.

Close with me by saying John 3:16

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life"*

*Together we say AMEN*