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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
June 11, 2017  
Trinity Sunday

Scripture Lessons: Genesis 1:1-2:3, Matthew 28:16-20

Hymns: 246; 245; 541; 644 (248:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 13:11-14

Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

<sup>12</sup> Greet one another with a holy kiss.

<sup>13</sup> All the saints greet you.

<sup>14</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit *be* with you all. Amen. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, the Only-begotten of the Father, fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Importance of Trinity Sunday --

Syncretism. I know that many don't like it when I throw out a big word, or an uncommon word, or one that only pastors know, but this is an important word. You know other "isms," and we know that often we think of "isms" as being not so good, maybe even bad. Many people don't like socialism, but others think it might not be so bad. Maybe less in dispute is communism. I would assume that the vast majority of Americans think that communism is bad, and we don't want to go there in America. So maybe you don't

know what syncretism is but know this, it's a lot more popular in America than socialism, and it's even more dangerous than communism. Syncretism is the idea that all religions are the same. Syncretism is the tendency to wash away or ignore any differences between religions. When we have these big prayer services after a natural disaster or following an act of terrorism, that's an act of syncretism. Every religion under the sun is going to have clergy present and they will all be praying in their turn, and everyone will say, "Isn't it wonderful." When public schools have baccalaureate services and they have a number of clergy present, but maybe not Islam or Judaism represented, and the participating clergy "sanitize" their prayers and remove Jesus' name from the service to be careful not to offend anyone, **that's syncretism**. When the President participates in the national day of prayer, or before the inauguration there is a huge prayer service in the national cathedral, and everyone devoutly bows their heads when each of the priests or imams or shamans gets up to pray to their god, that is **syncretism**, and very few Americans don't like it.

God doesn't like it. God doesn't like it at ALL! As you read the Old Testament you would do well to note that the Lord was more offended by the **syncretism** of the people of Israel than the idolatry of the heathen nations. The people of Israel and Judah thought it wise to cover the bases, so they worshiped the Lord on the Sabbath and kept the feast days, sometimes, but during the week they would serve Baal and Dagan, and Moloch and the other false gods of the nations surrounding them. Ultimately altars and images were erected to the false gods right in the temple courts, and children were burned alive to Moloch. And the northern kingdom of Israel was removed from the face of the earth, and the southern kingdom of Judah was destroyed; the people being carried away into the Babylonian captivity for 70 years. That is what God thinks of syncretism.

Are you learning the word yet? You should remember it because that is where many American mainstream denominations are heading if they are not already there. And God doesn't like it, not even a little bit. "***Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God.'***" (Isaiah 44:6).

Trinity Sunday is more important than ever because on Trinity Sunday we affirm this truth. On Trinity Sunday the Spirit of our God leads us to know and believe in --

**THEME: The Triune God: the God of Our Salvation.**

The first verse of our text really sets the tone for our meditation.

**2 Corinthians 13:11** Finally, brethren, farewell. Become complete. Be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Since it is the close of this final epistle to the congregation in Corinth it seems natural that Paul would have a statement of farewell, but that word is better and more commonly translated "Rejoice." Finally brethren, **rejoice** in the salvation of our God! Become complete in your faith and life in Christ Jesus. Be comforted by the gospel, be of one mind, dispense with all the dissension that plagued the congregation, as we see in so much of Christianity yet today. Live in peace, not in simple harmony with one another but in peace of conscience, in peace with God, and then the God of love and peace will be with you.

How do you get there? By making a concerted effort? By staying focused on living a good life? No! All this grace only comes by the blessing of the one true God, the Triune God, who alone is the God of our salvation. So then we quickly move to the last verse of our text which is well known by us. You have heard me say this benediction many, many times, extending to you the blessing of our God. It is known commonly as the Apostolic Benediction; it is also known, and for good reason, as the Trinitarian Benediction. It begins with:

**I. The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

How do we capture the wonder of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? We must begin with who our Lord Jesus Christ is from eternity. He is the Word who was from beginning, the Word by whom all things were made and without whom nothing was made that was made. (John 1:1, 3) He is the eternal God with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Consider the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

that for our sakes, without any benefit for Him except our salvation, He was made man. He took upon Himself our flesh and blood, and lived among us, and bore the burden of this life, and was born under the law. As our brother Jesus fulfilled all the righteous requirements of the law. This righteousness was secured **for us**, being credited to us through faith in His name.

Consider the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ “*who bore our sins in His body upon the tree*” (1 Peter 2:24). Yes, He was cursed because of our sins. He died in our place and was buried, and the third day rose again so that we might know the hope of resurrection, that we might have life in His name, for we live because He lives. So Jesus taught His disciples. On the evening before His death on the cross Jesus declared this gracious truth: “*Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.*” (John 14:19-20).

Please note the connection, that vital connection, between the Father and the Son as it is vital to our salvation. As we meditate upon the mystery of the Triune God we bask under –

## **II. The Love of God the Father.**

That is the second leg of this Trinitarian Benediction. We are blessed by the love of God. When we think of our confession of faith in the Apostle’s Creed we think of God the Father as the Creator. We read of the creation in our Old Testament lesson this morning. It is truly a wonder of the goodness and wisdom and majesty of God. Luther taught us in his explanation of the First Article that we ought to remember that God not only created us, but that He still preserves us and provides for all our needs both richly and daily. He doesn’t owe it to us. He does all this because He is our good and gracious Father in heaven. All this blessing comes to us out of “*fatherly divine goodness and mercy without any, without ANY merit or worthiness in me.*” But really as amazing as all that is, as wondrous as these blessings continue to be, it is not even the tip of the iceberg.

We are all familiar with the beautiful declaration of God’s love for us in John 3:16. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His*

*only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*” God loved the world, a world of sinful people who did not come to Him seeking His love, but by nature are recalcitrant sinners, daily showing how underserving we are of the love of God. And yet God the Father sent His Son into this world that we might live through Him. He offered up His only begotten Son not because He loved us more than His Son, but because of the greatness of His compassion for us wretched sinners. For God would not have the sinner die but that He turn from His sinful way and live. He did not want us to perish forever in the torments of hell. He loved us and sent His Son. He loved us, and directed the course of this world so that *“when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,<sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.<sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’”* (Galatians 4:4-6).

And once again the connection is made from one person of the Triune God and God’s involvement in our salvation to the next. We confess that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. This passage from Galatians reminds us of this wonder of grace that brings us home to God. The third leg of this Trinitarian Benediction is

### **III. The Communion of the Holy Spirit.**

The sanctifying power and work of the Holy Spirit is a critical blessing in our salvation. In this portion of the Benediction we are assured of the blessing of the Holy Spirit being one of “communion.” In this context we are not speaking of the Lord’s Supper. We are talking about our relationship with God. Are we in fellowship with God or not? Ever since the fall into sin, by nature we are God’s enemies. It is just as Paul wrote to the Romans: *“The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.<sup>8</sup> So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”* (Romans 8:7-8). There is no harmony. There is no fellowship. There is no remnant of the divine deep within our inner being that we might search for it and dig it out. Paul confessed the truth, *“I know that in me that is in my flesh nothing good dwells,”* (Romans 7:18)!

Luther taught us to confess in his explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed, *"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Christ Jesus my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in true faith."* This is the blessing that comes to us in the third part of this Apostolic Benediction. This not simply a nice sounding statement. This is a powerful blessing essential to our salvation. Paul declares quite clearly *"no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit."* (1 Corinthians 12:3). Without this blessing of the communion of the Holy Spirit we would be lost forever. All that Christ has done for us would be lost to us. We would indeed be without hope in the world. With the blessing of the Holy Spirit we have been called to faith by the gospel. We have been regenerated, born again as children of God. We have peace with God, harmony with God. We live with the Spirit abiding in our hearts, preserving us in true faith, guiding and directing us through the trials and tribulations and temptations of life. He is always strengthening us with the Word, equipping us with the Word that we might live to the glory of God, in hope of everlasting life, and in fellowship with the Holy Christian Church. Indeed Luther taught us the truth of the Spirit's blessed work, *"He calls gathers enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith."* (Luther's Small Catechism, Explanation to the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed).

And so it is a special blessing to share this bond, this blessing with like-minded Christians. That is what Paul encouraged in our text:

**2 Corinthians 13:12-13** "Greet one another with a holy kiss. <sup>13</sup> All the saints greet you."

In twenty-first century America we may not always greet one another with a holy kiss. It may be a warm handshake, but it communicates the joy that we have in knowing one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. This joy of fellowship is not limited to the local congregation. That is why Paul conveyed the greetings of other believers whom he called saints, saints because by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit we are made pure by the blood

of Jesus Christ, and we share this wonder of peace that is ours in the love of God.

What we celebrate today, and for that matter each and every time we gather around the Word, is that our God is the one and only true God, the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the God of our salvation!

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.