

“**EXPANSION**” – Pr Jim Sprengle, Ascension Lutheran Church – Portland.

- I. **Matthew 28:18-20** – All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”
- II. **Pop Quiz**...
  - a. Oh no Pastor Jim, I’m not ready for a quiz!
  - b. That’s why they call it a pop quiz, you are not supposed to expect it.
  - c. Question #1 – What does triune mean?
    - i. Tri plus Un = three in one...
    - ii. All the math we did where we say  $1+1+1 = 3$  is wrong in this case because  $1+1+1=1$  when it comes to God... who is three in One.
  - d. Question #2 – Going back to your Confirmation days, where in Luther’s Small Catechism is the topic of the Trinity?
    - i. You might be asking, what’s a catechism? Well, that’s just a way of teaching about the Christian faith in the form of questions and answers...
    - ii. Luther used a small catechism to outline 6 blocks in the Bible on which we build our faith.
      1. These blocks, or main parts, or “Chief Parts” of teaching in the Bible... 10 Commandments, Apostles’ Creed, Lord’s Prayer, Holy Baptism, Confession, and the Sacrament of the Altar (communion)
      2. Now that I’ve lost you... your eyes are glazed over and you are begging me just to get on with the part where I tell a story or something... here is the answer the question...
    - iii. Where is the topic of the Holy Trinity addressed in the Luther’s Small Catechism? It is found in the introduction to... the Apostles’ Creed.
    - iv. The Apostles’ Creed, the Second Chief Part, outlines the Trinity.
      1. Think about what we say each week after the Word is preached... “I believe... in God the Father as Creator, Jesus Christ who redeemed us, and the Holy Spirit who makes us holy or sanctifies us.”
      2. The Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds (and today, the longest one of all, the Athanasian Creed) are partly to describe who God is.
      3. In describing a God who is beyond our comprehension, these creeds are one way to understand God the best we can.
    - v. I often say this on Trinity Sunday, but our God is a great mystery – one of the greatest is that He (singular) can be three distinct persons.
      1. However, this is just fine with me, because it just means God is far bigger than my little mind can understand – and that’s good!
      2. If I could perfectly and logically understand God, then God is

not big enough – more likely I have made up my own god that fits in the box I want.

- e. I read a quote from a pastor named Kevin Miller where he said, “Here’s the beautiful thing: you don’t need to fully understand the Trinity to worship the Trinity, pray to the Trinity, and enter into the life of the Trinity.”
  - i. He goes on to say, “They tell me that deep within the core of the sun, the temperature is 27 million degrees. The pressure is 340 billion times what it is here on Earth. And in the sun’s core, that insanely hot temperature and unthinkable pressure combine to create nuclear reactions. In each reaction, 4 protons fuse together to create 1 alpha particle, which is .7 percent less massive than the 4 protons. The difference in mass is expelled as energy, and ... through a process called convection, this energy from the core of the sun finally reaches the surface, where it’s expelled as heat and light.”
  - ii. “Now that was all kind of interesting, but you know what? I didn’t need to know all that...”<sup>1</sup> in order to feel its warmth and have its light!
- f. That is what I really want to talk to you about today – not so much about the mystery of how God can exist as the Trinity – but what He **does!**

### III. **Jesus sends His disciples with a directive... a mandate:**

- a. As you go into the world with your faith, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teach people to follow all that I, Jesus have taught you.
- b. Jesus could have said many different things here, but He says – Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the name by which the one true God acts (does His work) through believers.
- c. I don’t need to go crazy trying to figure out the inner workings of God, but my role is to shine His light on people in an ever-expanding way.
- d. The tragedy is that we not only fail to carry out the expansion of God’s kingdom – We hinder it...
- e. Question #3 – How is God at work in this world?
  - i. The Apostles’ Creed tells us that the Father is Creator, the Son is Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies or makes us holy.
- f. If we believe that Jesus is God’s greatest act of grace to save all people, we can see a tangible way that God worked in the world – shined His light
  - i. Who He talked to
  - ii. Who He loved
  - iii. Who He taught and brought the truth
- g. Let me just give you a hint – it wasn’t the people who thought they understood God perfectly – and it certainly wasn’t the people who you might expect.
- h. The broken and hurting, the outcasts, the disabled, women and children, the ones who faced injustices, were all a part of God’s expansion – His kingdom came to those who needed a doctor to get better (Matthew 9:12)

- i. Tell me, who do you think Jesus would spend time with today?
- IV. **I spent the last week restless and discontent.**
- a. I am struggling to understand the sin that has reared its ugly head –
- i. From the senseless murder of George Floyd to the pain and suffering that is being inflicted on many people of every race by riots, arson and looting.
  - ii. I am trying to understand the pain that black people feel...not just from a horrific murder (which we were all pained to see) but the symbolic nature of a policeman and white man kneeling on the neck of a black man, struggling to breathe until he was asphyxiated.
  - iii. Whether or not you agree that it was a result of racism it doesn't really matter – because symbolically that picture spoke to the pain of many generations of people in our society.
  - iv. I realize that I am not qualified to speak to what it means to be black in America – and I don't know what racism is from having it directed at me.
  - v. I'm restless and discontent because I don't agree with stealing, vandalism, arson, and assaults... but I also want change because we are so divided.
  - vi. For goodness sake, we can't even let a pandemic happen without making it some kind of political circus! It's a disease, not politics!
  - vii. My hope and prayer is that meaningful change can break down the barriers, the hate, the racism and the division... and that's on us as Christians individually – because we have the answer.
- b. We have a world that wants the expansion of evil and sin, and yet there is a power so much greater than all of that – LOVE.
- V. **God so loved the world that He gave His only Son**, (John 3:16).
- a. The Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – loves us enough to act – not just be distant – but send the Son die on our behalf.
    - i. For the horrors of what we have seen in the past weeks.
    - ii. For the attitudes of racism and not understanding the pain of others.
    - iii. For the division we love more than the unity God wants (demands)
    - iv. For pulling back on God's love rather than expanding it to all people.
  - b. The Trinity is perfectly unified...Nothing is more perfect in love and power... and that is God's will for Christians too
  - c. We come together for the expansion of God's kingdom... to ALL people
  - d. Friends, we don't need to know the intricate details of how God works to know that He is at work through us – expanding His kingdom of love.
  - e. Now go into a divided and broken world and love on the hurting, care for the disenfranchised, and shine the light of God...in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Kevin Miller, in the sermon "Getting to Know Your God"