

## All We Need to Know

Wayne Waibel – 05/26/2024

Trinity Sunday today, Memorial Day tomorrow. While these are not exactly celebratory occasions, they most certainly are commemorative, and in that, need to be marked by us. That's a full weekend by any reckoning.

Most of us will make a pass by a cemetery or two somewhere in the next few days, and we'll all be very happy to settle into our summer routines come Tuesday. But what of the Trinity and how does that inform how we live and move and have our being?

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For John – there are two types of people in the world – those who understand, and those who do not. And this dynamic between Jesus and Nicodemus serves to capture that very essence.

Now, before you dismiss Nicodemus as the villain in this scene, let's remember that yes, he came to Jesus in the middle of the night; but he also understood that Jesus was very much a teacher from God.

He may not have wanted anyone to see he was associating with Jesus, but he did eventually defend Christ against the Sanhedrin, and ultimately helped Joseph of Arimathea tend to the Master's body after crucifixion. All in all – not a bad guy really.

And while Nicodemus serves as a sort of backdrop to illuminate the concept of the Trinity for Jesus, it wasn't until Constantine convened the council at Nicaea circa 325 CE that the theology of a Triune God came into practice.

By the late fourth century, the final form of what we now know as the Nicene Creed was adopted and affirmed by the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and eventually the Presbyterian and most other Protestant churches. Even with that historical perspective explained, the Trinity remains a classic example of how daily living often collides with theological concepts.

The doctrine of the Trinity is notoriously hard to understand. It is a human attempt to explain who the Christian church has understood God to be on the basis of scripture. The ecumenical dialogues surrounding the Trinity are still unresolved to this day.

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Quite often, such as is the case with Nicodemus, intellect can get in the way of true understanding. And when it comes to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, intellect can be downright confounding. Understanding of Jesus only comes as a gift. It can be sought, but it cannot be acquired – especially not as a result of study. It can only be given.

The fatal flaw with most academics is that they assume a superior intellect translates to heightened understanding, and it does not. Matters of the Spirit are especially resistant to logical explanations.

God is holy; we are not. Here endeth the lesson, and any attempt to maneuver around that basic truth will end in abject failure. This is the kind of living according to the flesh that Paul talks about in his letter to the church in Rome. Living for that which is transient, pursuing self-interests – often at the expense of others, and ignoring the presence of God.

The good news is that everyone is invited to look for the intersection of their passions and talents and the world's needs. That crossroads informs the basis upon which the birth from above, or being born again, can be realized. It is at this point that we begin to acknowledge the Triune God. Here is where worship becomes the meeting ground between God and humanity.

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We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became truly human.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

Tip of the cap to the boys at Nicaea. Well done and done.

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It is the nature of God to be in relationship. That intimate relationship of faith is established by the Spirit of God and will not fail. Living into love instead of fear broadens the entire vista of creation, so that we may see it through divine eyes.

And this gift is extended to us through the divine intercession of a "God who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Eternal life is shaped by and utterly dependent on God's love. "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

The Greek word for saved translates to – rescued, healed, made whole. Therefore, Christians are not merely forgiven, but made whole – in essence – remade in God's image as participants in God's new creation.

So, we move boldly in our daily lives – sometimes with particular gallantry – living into love instead of fear because we have the assurance of our blessed Trinity. The parental love of God the Father, the awesome power of the Holy Spirit, and the eternal presence of our Brother – Christ Jesus. And that is all we need to know. Amen.