

The Trinity is All About Jesus

John 8:48-59

The Holy Trinity, May 22, 2016, Confirmation Day

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Let us understand the full implications of what our Lord is saying. He is saying that He is the God of Abraham. That means that He is the One who promised Abraham that Abraham would have descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. He is the God who promised to make Abraham great. He is the One who promised that kings would come out of Abraham. He is the One who commanded that Abraham circumcise all the males in His family on the eighth day. Jesus is the God who appeared to Abraham as a man at the oaks of Mamre and told Abraham that he would have a son the following year.

And Jesus did bring kings out of Abraham culminating in Himself. Jesus did give offspring to Abraham as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. By virtue of His actions we have been grafted into Israel and have become descendants of Abraham and heirs of the promise.

If Jesus is the God of Abraham, then He is also the God of Isaac and Jacob. He is the God who saved Joseph out of prison. He is the God who brought the descendants of Jacob into Egypt. Jesus appeared to Moses in flames of fire in a bush on Mount Sinai. Jesus sent Moses into Egypt. Jesus sent the plagues against Pharaoh through Moses. Jesus is the God who brought judgment on the gods of Egypt. Jesus is the God who struck down the first born of Egypt. Jesus is the God who parted the waters of the Reed Sea and saved Israel from the Egyptian chariots. Jesus is the God who appeared to Moses on the top of Mount Sinai and gave him the Ten Commandments. Jesus is the God who was offended when the Israelites worshipped the golden calf.

Shall I go on or do you get the reality? Jesus is the God who promised David that he would always have a descendent to sit upon his throne. And Jesus is the descendent who always sits on David's throne.

In any discussion about God the identity of Jesus is always at stake.

Why recite the Athanasian Creed once a year? I know that some of you would like to do without it altogether. Does Pastor just get some seedy kind of delight in making you recite it once every year? Pastor likes things that are long. He likes long hymns. Why not long creeds? What is the Trinity really all about?

Do you know that the doctrines of the Athanasian Creed were not developed until an argument arose in the Church over the identity of Jesus? I don't often do this, but I think that it is important for you to know this. In the early part of the Church's history in the 4th century a guy by the name of Arius began to teach his adult catechumens that there was a time when Jesus did not exist. In other words Arius taught that Jesus was not fully God. He was not fully Divine. He was some kind of lesser creature. Once it got back to Arius' bishop that he was teaching this, Arius was rebuked, but he persisted in teaching it. What ensued was a church wide argument over who Jesus is. Is He God? If He is, then He is equal to the Father! Is He God? If He is, then He is of the same substance as the Father.

It is only when the Church contended with this question that the doctrine of the Trinity as we have it in the Athanasian Creed developed. Therefore the whole reason that your confirmation pastor taught you about the Trinity and used all of those fancy words and tried to explain the paradox was because he was trying to convey to you who Jesus is. All of the discussions about the Trinity are really

about Jesus. If no one ever bothered to answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" there would be no doctrine of the Trinity and there would be no Athanasian Creed.

Our Lord's statements in John 8 are pretty clear about the subject. He says, "Before Abraham was, I am." The Jews knew exactly what He meant by that. That is why they picked up stones to stone Him. He, a mere man, had claimed to be the God Most High. They thought that was blasphemy. And if it were not true, it would have been blasphemy. They thought He deserved to die for what He had said.

There would have been no long creeds to recite, if there had not been the question of the identity of Jesus. In other words the question is this, "Who is this Jesus who came from Nazareth?" Who is He? Is He a Samaritan? Is He a demon possessed man? Is He a lunatic? Is He a liar? Is He a blasphemer? Is He the Lord?

There is much that hangs on the answer to these questions.

If Jesus is not God, then the salvation that He offers is the salvation that only a mere man can offer. But we know that mere men cannot offer any kind of salvation. If Jesus is not God, He cannot make promises like this: If anyone should keep my Word, He will not see death in the age to come. If Jesus is a mere man that statement is misleading and blasphemous. It is only if Jesus is God that He can make the promise that if anyone should keep His word, that person will not see death in the age to come.

But if Jesus is God then that promise stands. It upholds your faith because almighty God stands behind the promise.

If Jesus is not God, how can His blood atone for your sins? If Jesus is a mere man, even if He were a perfect man, His blood could atone for maybe the sins of one other person, but not for the whole world and certainly not for you. It is only if Jesus is God that He can atone for the sins of all of the humanity. If Jesus is not God, He cannot give you His body to eat and His blood to drink. Even if He did rise from the dead it does not matter. Risen from the dead people do not become gods. Therefore if Jesus is not God, then the Sacrament of the Altar is a nothing and it means nothing and we are deceiving Lynnae and Olaf by pretending that is all important and making them wait until they completed confirmation training before receiving it.

If Jesus is not God, how can He make promises of any kind and make them binding. He cannot promise you anything. If He is a mere man He might be able to make a few promises to the people of His own time regarding temporal things of that time, but He will not be able to make promises of any other kind. He certainly cannot promise you anything, unless He is God. He certainly cannot promise you anything big, like your everlasting salvation, unless He is God.

Olaf and Lynnae are going to take a vow momentarily that says that they will suffer all even death rather than to fall away from this faith in Jesus. Unless Jesus is God such a vow is useless and cruel to impose on ones so young or on anyone for that matter. Why die for someone who is not worth dying for?

So, if Jesus is not God then Holy Baptism is a sham and a waste of time. The Divine Service is a sham because we spend our time singing His praises. If He is not God such praises are idolatrous and foolish. If Jesus is not God, then your faith is a waste.

So the identity of Jesus is all important. So He tells you who is He. He is not a Samaritan. He does not have a demon. He is therefore not a lunatic or a liar. He is the great I Am. He is the Lord.

It is little wonder that He commanded the wind and the waves and they obeyed Him. It is little wonder that He changed water into wine. It is little wonder that He restored the blind and the lame and the dead. He is God.

What the Athanasian Creed does is work out that truth in philosophical terms. And as some of you have pointed out it does not always work it out in biblical terms because the creed and the Bible are talking about two different things. The Bible has more to say than the creed does.

Now there are further implications. The Divinity of our Lord means that any discussion of God apart from Jesus is not a discussion about God. Let me say that again. This is very important. Any discussion of God apart from Jesus is not a discussion about God. There are people who will talk about "God" as long as the day is long and they sound all righteous and holy, but unless they talk about Jesus, they are not talking about God no matter how many times they use the word "God."

If it is impossible to have a discussion about God apart from Jesus then it is also impossible to have a discussion about God apart from the crucifixion of Jesus. It is impossible to have a discussion about God apart from the resurrection of Jesus. The cross and the empty tomb represent the chief achievements of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are inseparable from Jesus as He is from God. People might think that they are talking about God apart from the cross and the empty tomb, but they are not. Without the cross and the empty tomb any God talk is actually devoid of God and such people regardless of how brilliant their philosophizing may be have joined the Israelites of old in bowing down to a golden calf, a god of their own creation, created by their own ingenuity.

Olaf and Lynnae, there is no faith in God apart from Jesus. The reason is that there is no God apart from Jesus. He is the One true God. He is the, "Let there be light," in the beginning that created light. So when you take your confirmation vows and continue in your holy faith, do not wander from Jesus. To wander from Jesus is to wander from God.

The flip side is this: to have Jesus is to have God. If you have Jesus there is nothing else that you need. You have it all. If you have Jesus, there is no other god that you need, you have God. If you have Jesus, there is nothing else that you need to achieve. You have Jesus. If you have Jesus, you have all of the righteousness that you need. You have all of the holiness that you need. You have all of the god stuff that you need. There is no philosophy that is necessary to be added in order to achieve true godliness, you already have it all in Him.

This is why the identity of Jesus is so important. This is why your confession of faith is so important. This is why our creeds are so important. This is why the words of Jesus are so important and also why that if anyone should keep them they will not see death in the age to come.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.