

John 3:1-17

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

"How can this be?" Nicodemus asked. "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?

No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven--the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Christian Friends:

How many of you understand Math? Math is one of those subjects where it seems that either it makes sense to you or it doesn't. There doesn't seem to be many people that fall in the middle. Math people always say that math is easy because it is always exact and precise. Math people say that it always follows rules of logic. Math does not tolerate contradictions. $1 + 1 = 2$ every single time. There is no arguing or debating the answer. I have admit that I am not much of a math guy, but that being said I know that math is good. We use math in engineering, economics, architecture, construction, manufacturing and cooking.

But there is one area where math doesn't really have a place and that is when we talk about God and his plan of salvation. Today on this Trinity Sunday we are going to see God's math. God's math goes like this – The true God of the Bible is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. That is clearly three, isn't it, as we said before earthly math would go $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$ – enough said! Earthly math and our earthly human minds want to logically say that the God of the Bible is not one God but three gods. But this morning we are going to see through our eyes of faith as presented in God's Word that the three persons of the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three very distinct and different persons and yet they are one God equal in every way in power and might. God's math would go a little different -- $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. So this morning our theme will point out salvation using God's Ways:

Theme: Salvation – Brought to You by Your Triune God;

- 1. The Father gave his Son for you**
- 2. The Son died on the cross for you**
- 3. The Spirit gives you life.**

Now, in our Gospel lesson Jesus does not give a detailed explanation of the inner relationship of the Triune God. However, his conversation with Nicodemus shows us Father, Son and Holy Spirit. First, Jesus says, "**No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.**" Jesus says that the only way to have a relationship with the true God is for the Holy Spirit to give a new life through the sacrament of baptism. So the Holy Spirit is true God because only God can create spiritual life.

Now, after showing that the Holy Spirit is true God, Jesus goes on to show how he is also true God. Jesus calls himself, "The Son of Man: and says, **No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven -- the Son of Man.**" Jesus says that he is the only one who came from heaven and has the power to go to heaven. The only way for a man to do that would be if that man were also true God. Jesus has done it. Jesus is true God.

And so, Jesus shows us the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But he doesn't show us the Trinity simply for the sake of filling our head with facts. If Jesus were only concerned about theological statements and dogmatic formulas, then the criticism that many students have of math would also be true of our Christian faith. You know what I mean. When students are confused by the Pythagorean Theorem or when they are lost during an Algebra or Geometry problem, they often complain, "Why do I have to learn this stuff? I'm never going to use this stuff in the real world!"

Well, perhaps sometimes you have thought that way about religion. Perhaps you have complained, "Why does God have to be so confusing? I can't understand how one plus one plus one equals only one. The teaching on the Trinity just doesn't make sense. And why is it so important that I know this? What does it matter whether or not I know about the Trinity?"

Well, when a student struggles with math, the teacher tries to explain. The teacher breaks the concepts down into small, simple steps. Then the teacher says, "There! Do you understand now? It's not that hard. You can get it."

When it comes to the Trinity the Bible never does what a good teacher does. The Bible never says, "The teaching of the Trinity is simple to understand." No, instead, God himself says in the Bible, **As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts [are higher] than your thoughts.** So the Bible is not like a teacher who claims that math is easy. The Bible honestly says, "There are some things you will never understand about God. It's impossible for you to figure it out. So, don't use math or logic or science to discover the truth about God. Instead, accept the truth about God by faith."

Faith — that brings us to how the Bible is like a math teacher. When a student complains, "I am never going to use this stuff in the real world," a good teacher has the answer. A good teacher shows the student how you use math in balancing your check book, shopping, and doing home projects.

Well, that's also what Jesus does in our text. Jesus shows us how the Trinity is more than just a bunch of religious facts. Jesus shows us how practical the teaching of the Trinity is. He shows us how Father, Son and Holy Spirit work in the real world of our life and salvation. Jesus says, **For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

Jesus lists the three necessary and essential parts of how we get forgiveness, life and salvation. When you have one Father loving you plus one Son of God dying on the cross for you and one Holy Spirit giving you faith, then you have one gift of forgiveness, life and salvation. You have the one and only way to eternal life in heaven.

That's why we insist that our God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If you take away one person's work, you are not saved. If you take away the Father's love, then all you have is an angry God who has every right to send you to hell because of your sins. If you take away the death of Jesus Christ, you have to pay for your sins all by yourself. You can't do that. So, again the result is eternal damnation in hell.

If you take away the Holy Spirit's gift of faith, then you cannot receive all the blessings of God's love and the holiness of the Son. So, again, if you take away the work of the Holy Spirit, the result is hell and suffering forever.

However, hell is not your fate. That's because the Father does love you from eternity to eternity. The Son did die on the cross to pour out his innocent blood and wash away all your sins. The Holy Spirit did put faith in your heart through baptism and the preaching of the gospel. The Holy Spirit keeps you in the faith through Word and sacrament. So that means you do have eternal life and not eternal death.

Eternal life or eternal death—there is nothing more practical than that! So that's why we baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. That's why we forgive sins in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit. That's why we make the sign of the cross in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. That's why we conclude our prayers in the name of the Triune God. That's why we end our worship with a blessing that uses the name of the Lord three times. Your life and salvation completely and entirely depend on Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So, one plus one plus one equals one—one God and his one and only way to bring you to heaven. Now, one plus one plus one equals one is terrible math. It's not logical, scientific or even understandable and explainable. But one plus one plus one equals one is the most excellent theology. It is also the truth. It is the truth that saves you now and forever. AMEN.