

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Trinity Sunday - Year C

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Psalm 8

Romans 5:1-5

John 16:12-15

06/16/2019

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

[Jesus said,] 12“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Trinity!

Good morning! *“Two years he walks the earth. No phone, no pool, no pets, no cigarettes. Ultimate freedom. An extremist. An aesthetic voyager whose home is the road. Escaped from Atlanta. Thou shalt not return, 'cause "the West is the best." And*

*now after two rambling years comes the final and greatest adventure. The climactic battle to kill the false being within and victoriously conclude the spiritual pilgrimage. Ten days and nights of freight trains and hitchhiking bring him to the Great White North. No longer to be poisoned by civilization he flees, and walks alone upon the land to become lost in the wild.” - Alexander Supertramp May 1992¹ It was this line that drew me in to the story of Christopher McCandless. The story is told in the 1996 book and 2007 film both by the same name: *Into the Wild*.*

His story is interesting; he grew up in a well-to-do family in the Washington D.C. Suburbs. In May of 1990 he graduated from Emory University, where he got A's in classes like Apartheid in South African Society and History of Anthropological Thought and Contemporary African Politics and the Food Crisis in Africa.² But shortly after graduation, he disappeared. His family was used to him taking long trips, but this one was different. He donated the remaining \$24,000 of his savings account to a non-profit, got rid of most of his possessions, and set the money in his wallet on fire. He spent the next two years trekking across the United States. His ultimate goal was Alaska, and he made it there in April of 1992. Four months later, his body was found in an abandoned school bus. He weighed only 75 pounds at the time of his autopsy.³

His story has captivated thousands over the years, myself included. He was an intense and intelligent man who was struggling to find something. Unfortunately, I don't know if he ever did. He wanted to be alone... but he found only death. We're

¹ *Into the Wild*, 2007

² Krakauer, Jon. *Into the Wild*. New York: Anchor Books, 1997. p. 21.

³ *Ibid.* p. 14.

fascinated with the struggle of survival alone. Just turn on the Discovery Channel and you'll see a variety of shows based on facing the wilderness by yourself. McCandless' story and our fascination with survival only help to illustrate my point: God, a being of community and relationship, has created us for exactly the same thing. We believe in the Triune God, a God of Three-in-One, a God whose very existence gives us the model for our own lives. So, on this most Holy of Sundays, let's take a look at the one word that has struck fear into pastors, seminary students, and Sunday school teachers for generations: Trinity.

Pastors have a nickname for Holy Trinity Sunday, they call it Heresy Sunday. If you are confused and overwhelmed by the Trinity, fear not, you're not the only one. Listen to the word of our dear brother Martin Luther and take heart: *"In all this God has revealed more to us than we can ever accomplish. But for the rest — for instance, how the Trinity can be but one God... That you must not try to understand; you must believe it. Leave it to God..."*⁴ It's a confusing thing, and if you took a look at the article I had Sue send out in the weekly email a few days ago, you can see that it seems like every way we try to talk about about the Trinity leads us to heresy. Now the word heresy can sound intimidating, but it's just a fancy way of saying something that isn't in line with what the church believes. It can be defined as a *"belief or opinion contrary to orthodox religious doctrine."*⁵ We don't talk about the Trinity. Everyone is so afraid of getting it wrong that we just don't say anything. Our fear has driven us to exclude the Trinity. I

⁴ Volume 22 Luther, Martin, and Jaroslav Pelikan. *Luther's Works*. Vol. 22. St. Louis Miss: Concordia Pub. House, 1957. pp. 314-315

⁵ To arrive at this definition simply visit www.google.com and search "define heresy" and the search engine will provide the answer I have written above.

think I've used this quote every Trinity Sunday, but I'll keep using it until it's not true. In Karl Rahner's 1967 work titled, of all things, *The Trinity*, he writes that "*Christians are, in their practical life, almost mere 'monotheists.'* We must be willing to admit that, *should the doctrine of the Trinity have to be dropped as false, the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged.*"⁶

But the Trinity is so much more than that! It is literally the center of our faith, a God who exists in some unexplainable way as three persons, but one being. If you don't get it, don't worry, none of us truly do. But if you remember nothing else from any sermon I ever give remember this, because it's literally at the heart of my personal theology: God isn't alone, God exists in community together as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And if God exists together in community, then we should, too. That's what is so sadly ironic about the story of Christopher McCandless. He went off to try and survive alone, to cast off any help from anyone, and yet his story is rich with interactions that only go to prove my point. He survived as long as he did thanks to his intelligence, and his ability to LEARN from others! His skills were given and taught to him by someone else, and the very shelter he died in was the creation and work of another person. We are meant to be together, not apart.

Our Bible is rich with stories of the dangers of being alone. In the beginning, Adam is given a partner during creation. The Bible ends in Revelation with a story of a city so large that everyone on the planet is able to live there together. Our God calls us into community, a very counter-cultural mindset now-a-days. A pastor at seminary once made the comment to me that we're no longer front-porch-people. Instead, now we're

⁶ Rahner 10-11

back-porch-people. We build walls, we seek more and more privacy, and this attitude only works to insulate us from the people around us that God is calling us to meet and love.

In the book *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*, we hear from several different Lutheran authors and in chapter 5 titled “Called Out of Our Comfort Zone” they write that “*Congregations are the creation of the Triune God and find their identity and purpose in their relationship with God.*”⁷ We are a people, a congregation, called out to witness in RELATIONSHIPS the love of our God. Everyone thinks that sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ is about knocking on doors or handing out pamphlets. But this is so not true! No, we’re called into relationships with those around us, whether we like them or not, whether we want to or not! Because if the God of the ENTIRE universe doesn’t go at it alone, what makes you think we can?!

Do you understand the Trinity? I doubt it, I sure don’t. But maybe that’s the whole point. Because when we aren’t sure about something, what do we do? We go talk to our friends. And as we sit together as a community we grow in fellowship and love. Maybe that was the Triune God’s plan all along. Amen.

⁷ Bliese, Richard H., and Craig Gelder. *The Evangelizing Church: A Lutheran Contribution*. Minneapolis, Minn: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2005. P. 71.