

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Romans 8:12-17
May 30, 2021

First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson

Last Sunday, we baptized Milo Jefferson Harris, Bill and Judy's great-grandson, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. That's called a Trinitarian baptism, which is recognized by most denominations who practice Trinitarian baptism.

In this baptism, God pours out upon us the essence of all that he is – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Trinity. And then it's our job – our calling – to live into that baptism, both our own and the baptism of others, which this and all Trinitarian congregations do when we promise to nurture the faith in others.

So, what does it mean to be a Trinitarian congregation, to believe in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God in three persons? The Apostle Paul sheds light on this in today's New Testament lesson. Paul says, "... All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God."

Isn't this what we affirm and profess in baptism? After Milo was baptized, I declared, "This child has now been received into the family of faith through the membership of this congregation. See what love the Father has for us – that we should be called children of God, and we are" (based on 1 John 3:1). "... All who are led by the Spirit of God," says Paul, "are children of God." It is by the leading of the Spirit that we accept and affirm our identity as children of God, which we celebrate in baptism. It is by the guidance of the Holy Spirit that we live into our baptism, finding our way in life.

How much do you rely on the Holy Spirit to discern the best way forward? That's an important question. When we get hit with trouble after knowingly shooting ourselves in the foot, that's a pretty good indication we've been relying on our own aim in life, and not letting the Holy Spirit point us in the right direction. To be part of a Trinitarian church like ours means using prayer, scripture, and the wise counsel of family and friends to help you follow the Holy Spirit's leading.

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. The second person of the Trinity is Jesus Christ. When Paul says, "You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption," he's pointing us to Jesus.

It is through Jesus Christ that we are brought into the family of faith, adopted as children of God. Remember at Jesus' baptism when the Holy Spirit descended like a dove? That's when the voice of God was heard saying, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11).

The spirit of adoption we receive and affirm in baptism makes us brothers and sisters in Christ, regardless of our biological families. I mean, how much pain and suffering has been endured by those who believe their biological brothers or sisters, sons or daughters should act better, be nicer, more generous and loving?!?

And yet Jesus was clear that our true brothers and sisters, parents and children – in God's eyes – are those in our family of faith, the church. Now, of course, the family of faith might include your biological family, and that's great if it does. The trouble and heartache come when we expect Christlike behavior from family and friends outside the church, outside the faith, and they let us down. That's hurtful and tragic.

And that's when we need our church family the most, not that we're perfect all the time. We're not. We don't always act in a Christlike manner. But that is the goal. And we do have each other to help guide us to be more gracious and merciful in our attitudes and actions.

To be part of a Trinitarian church means relying on the Holy Spirit to guide us and relying on the family of faith to come along side us as brothers and sister in Christ, no matter what anyone else thinks about us, even our own family. I guess that's part of what it means to be born again – having Jesus, the second person of the Trinity bring us into getting a new, bigger family, which you can always turn to for help and support.

This brings us to the first person of the Trinity, God the Father. Paul says, "When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ...."

When Paul speaks of us as heirs, he literally means we have an inheritance coming to us as children of God. By embracing God as Father, we are embracing the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, acknowledging our place in the family line of the ancient Israelites.

The inheritance promised to the Israelites through Abraham was “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 3:8) – the promised land. God also promised Abraham descendants, children “as numerous as the stars of the sky and the sand on the seashore” (Gen. 12:17). And God promised that through Abraham, all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). This blessing of God is for all people who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and the promised land that we inherit through Christ is eternal life with God in heaven.

Here on earth, we suffer, just as Jesus suffered. Or as Paul says, “... We suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.” Jesus was glorified through the resurrection, and that promise of future glory is ours, too, as children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Look, life has its ups and downs, its joys and sorrows, triumphs and tragedies. But through it all, we have hope in the sure promise of the Lord. When all is said and done and we are near the end of life, that’s what we have to hold on to – the resurrection promise of the Lord. That’s all we can hold onto, all we can take with us, and that’s the legacy of faith that we leave behind, for those we welcome and nurture in the church family. Everything else, falls to the wayside.

Take for instance, the obituary of a man who discovered the earthly value of his life after his death. When the man died, his wife went to the local newspaper to place the obituary. The editor told her its 50 cents per word. She paused, reflected, and then said, “Well then, let it read ‘Fred Brown died.’” Amused at the woman’s thrift, the editor tells her there is a seven-word minimum. She thinks things over and a few seconds later says, “In that case, let it read, ‘Fred Brown died: ’83 pickup for sale.’”¹

Now if that man had been part of this church family, we would have chipped in for a proper obituary, right? But as it is, his life and all of our lives – all our ups and downs, joys and sorrows, triumphs and tragedies – it all points to the only one we can count on, our Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the Father who gives us eternal life, the Son through whom we are children of God, and the Holy Spirit who guides us along the way.

Finally, let’s look at the Trinity as a whole, the three-in-one. The Trinity is a mystery beyond our comprehension – how God can be three distinct persons in one being. And yet, it is helpful, and really neat, to know that the Greek word perichoresis, which is used to describe the Trinity, can be loosely translated as “circle dance.”

¹. TTTL98@aol.com, "Monday 5/11 Obituary." May 11, 1998. Personal e-mail.

The Trinity is the dance of life, and to be invited into the dance is to be invited into relationship with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. When we join in this dance of the Holy Trinity, we join hands with God and one another in a circle of mutual love and acceptance, support and service, just like a family. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

O God, what a joy it is that we can live as people of hope. On Memorial Day like no other we are grateful for the peace of knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that our place is with you when our time on this Earth is through.

We long to be with you, surrounded by your beauty. Help us to live with this vision always uplifting our hearts, even as we thank you for the taste of heaven we have here. It is a gift beyond measure that stirs in us a longing for more.

We thank you, too, for the gift of those who are now with you in the fullness of your glory, especially those men and women who gave their lives serving and defending this country in the Armed Forces.

Also, Lord, we pray your blessing and peace upon all who take time this weekend to remember their loved ones who are now with you in glory.

We are thankful, Lord, for the opportunity to minister to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. As an act of this ministry, we pray now for those in need of comfort and healing.

Hear these and all our prayers, Heavenly Father – prayers spoken and unspoken – and bring your beauty, your truth, your Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name, as he taught us, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**