

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Trinity Sunday, June 7, 2009

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Hymns: 237, 245: 1-3, 239, 250, 244.

Lessons: Genesis 1, 2 Corinthians 13:11-14, John 6:60-71.

Text: 2 Corinthians 13: 14.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Our sermon text summarizes the work of each person of the triune God in one word. We today have come to expect sound bites, brevity, short summaries of information that don't take very long. A "sound bite" is defined as "a brief recorded statement (as by a public figure) broadcast especially on a television news program; *also*: a brief catchy comment or saying". People are accustomed to everything being quick, to being in a hurry and even to multitasking, trying to do more than one thing at a time. So, the short story is that we will present three words today: "Grace, Love, and Fellowship", or as the KJV puts it "Grace, Love and Communion".

We aren't accustomed to listening to long speeches unless there is something exciting going on. We sometimes struggle to stay awake in a sermon which is less than 25 minutes and sometimes less than 20 minutes long. The pastor – me – tries to make it interesting but sometimes I can see your interest or attention flagging. Your children, too, get restless. It is a difficult job to train children to sit quietly for a sermon, but it is a skill that you have learned! I looked at two of Martin Luther's sermons and I estimate that they are much more than twice as long as the sermons I prepare, perhaps as much as three times as long. You may even remember from your literature or history classes that early American preachers would even preach for several hours and that church services would take all morning, most of it being the sermon.

Three words are the heart of our sermon text. Why am I talking about how long something takes? Well, we sometimes can't get the complete story in just a few words. Sometimes I'm especially frustrated by the extremely brief "USA Today" type of news snippets. Even in the matters of the world, there are times when we want a complete "Wall Street Journal" type of news story. Why am I talking about simplicity and comparing it with completeness?

There is so much to learn from God's Word! We realize that Jesus has the words of eternal life, as Peter told us in our Gospel lesson: "**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.**" You also know the simplest of salvation passages: "**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.**" John 3:16. That is the gospel in a nutshell and you don't need much more to be saved eternally. So why not just give you a three-word sermon?

Well, Saint Peter closes his second and final letter with the words "**But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever!**" 2 Peter 3:18. When did you stop eating baby food? Would you want to eat just the cereal that a baby moves on to as it outgrows nursing or the bottle? Of course not. You want solid food and you want variety in what you eat. And most of us want plenty to eat. So let's compare that earthly food to the spiritual food we find in God's Word. Saint Paul told the Corinthians early in his first letter "**Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly--mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.**" 1 Corinthians 3:1-2.

We read in the letter to the Hebrew Christians "**In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the**

laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And God permitting, we will do so." Hebrews 5:12-6:3.

Peter says we are to desire good food as we grow up in our salvation: *"Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."* 1 Peter 2:2-3.

Yes, there is room to grow, to move from the spiritual milk of the Word of God to the spiritual meat of the Word of God. There is more we should want to know. We should want to immerse ourselves in what there is to learn. And how much more is there to learn?

Did you become a farmer or a machinist, or a sign-painter or a cook or a teacher's aide just by learning three words? Did you become a nurse, or a tool and die maker or a pilot or an accountant or a minister or – well, name your own occupation – just by learning three words?

In seminary, we spent one whole school year of daily classes of about 55 minutes each going through volume 2 of a three-volume set of Christian doctrine called "Christian Dogmatics" by Franz Pieper. It was translated from the German and about 400 pages of its 557 English language pages teach what the Bible says about Jesus Christ, just one of the three persons of the Triune God. That's an example of the "Wall Street Journal version" of Christian doctrine.

OK. Here's the "USA Today version" of this sermon: Today let's look briefly at

THE GIFTS OF THE TRIUNE GOD

- 1. Grace**
- 2. Love**
- 3. Fellowship or "communion"**

It is a mistake to think that the doctrine of the triune God, three persons in one God, was developed in the New Testament. You heard all three persons named in our Old Testament lesson today. Where? Well, *"God created the heavens and the earth."* Genesis 1:1. That speaks of creation, one of the chief works of God the Father. In verse 2, you see that the *"Spirit of God"* moved upon the face of the waters. But where is Jesus Christ? Well, we find that in the first three words of the third verse: *"And God said"*. What? How does that point to Jesus Christ? Well, what does John say at the beginning of his gospel? *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* The NIV goes on *"He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men."* John 1:1-4.

If you are still wondering who *"he"* or *"the Word"* is, you can go to verse 14 to ascertain that Jesus Christ is "the Word", for that reads *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."* John 1:14 (KJV).

Jesus Christ is the Word of God. We could spend more time talking about that indisputable fact, but we want instead to look at all three persons of the triune God. Just remember that in the first three verses of the Bible all three persons of the Triune God are identified.

Triune means "three in one", as in "three distinct, unique persons in one God". The Israelites were known in the ancient world for their one God – monotheism. They didn't have separate gods for the sea, for war, for the crops, for the sun and the moon, and so on. But as I just showed from Genesis, there are three distinct, unique persons recorded from the beginning of scripture as being part of that one God.

Paul says in our text, wishing blessings upon the Corinthian Christians, and us, too, with the words *"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ ... be with you all."* Grace has that simple meaning of God's undeserved love, goodness, and mercy. Is there anything more undeserved than love from the very person of the Godhead who suffered hell for you and now gives you eternal life? Is there anything greater than the goodness of Jesus Christ, who gives you hope beyond this miserable life? Is there anything greater than the mercy, the kindnesses of Jesus Christ, who suffered and died for you? This is the Lord Jesus Christ, the master of all things, who beat death at its own game. The grave couldn't hold him. He has been given all power over all things by his Father in heaven. He is truly Lord and Master of it all.

The second part of this benediction, and a benediction is literally an "expression of good wishes" and that "which promotes goodness and well-being", comes upon us, too. Paul says *"may ... the love of God... be with*

you all". Is there any greater love than that of the Father in heaven who sacrificed his one and only Son so that all sinful mankind might live? In his first letter John marvels: **"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"** 1 John 3:1. Can you imagine a love 100 times greater, even 1000 times greater, or a million times greater than any you have seen or could imagine on earth? That's how much God the father loved us. Sure, he created all things, and gives us life and breath. This is the God that the Greeks in Athens called "THE UNKNOWN GOD". As wise as they imagined themselves, they had a place to worship an "UNKNOWN GOD" just so they didn't forget any gods and make them angry. Paul speaks of the one they call "UNKNOWN", for they didn't know him as **"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else."** Acts 17:24-25. At first Paul didn't want to confuse them with a detailed discussion of the triune God. This first person of the true triune God doesn't need anything. He created all things, and so he doesn't need man to give him a name or to make him up or to make up activities which men think he does. In fact, many men instead take away from this true God, the Father, the entire act of creation of all things. This is the God whom the chosen people in the Old Testament knew as "Jehovah", or "Jahveh", for they regarded his name as so holy they didn't even pronounce it out loud. They substituted other names that mean "Lord" or "Master" for the name which in your Bibles is written as "LORD" in all capital letters. Just review the first article of the creed that you learned from the catechism about how he loves you. He created you and all things. He still preserves you, providing everything you need for your body and life. He also preserves you by defending you against all danger, guarding and protecting you from all evil. We confess "All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it. For all this I ought to thank and praise, to serve and obey him."

And finally Paul asks that **"the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."** The KJV uses the word "communion". Here, this is not the sacrament of Holy Communion but "fellowship". That word translated "fellowship" or "communion" (Greek koinonia) is used to refer to several things. It is used in different places to talk about the Lord's Supper, or the sharing of earthly material goods, as the disciples did soon after Pentecost when believers had all things in common, or the sharing of faith by telling others about God's plan of salvation in Jesus Christ, as well as what we know as "fellowship", that is, doing religious things together. We sometimes think of fellowship as summarized in the idea of "church fellowship", meaning "doing religious things together". But fellowship or communion in this verse is greater than just the things we do to exercise or practice church fellowship. It is the fellowship itself. It is that bond which is invisible in itself and which shows itself in doing such outward things as gathering to join in prayer, hymns, and worship. It is the fact that all believers are part of the invisible "Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints". The Holy Spirit works to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ, thus also making them part of the fellowship scripture teaches as the Holy Christian Church, the invisible fellowship of all believers.

So there is really a great deal of God's grace, love, and fellowship behind those three words in our text. **"May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."** Amen.