

# Sermon Text for June 12, 2022

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

## *Psalm 26:1-3 and Titus 3:4-7*

### *“What we believe”*

There's a lot jammed into this one Sunday, again. It is graduation Sunday so congratulations to our graduates and all that they have accomplished and all that they will be doing in their future. It is Trinity Sunday and it traditionally is a Sunday when we try to unravel and explain the Trinity in its complexity and in its entirety. How do you use words that are so limited to talk about and explain a limitless God? It is Commissioning Sunday when we commission the youth to go on a mission trip to Italy and be our hands and feet and represent us and Jesus well as they go on this mission.

It is also Chris' last Sunday with us, a time of recognizing that God has used Chris powerfully and that as a congregation we hope and pray that we have been of some blessing to Chris as well in his journey of faith with his Savior Jesus Christ. One thing you may not be aware of is that it is also Bronkema Olympics Sunday. Two of my brothers and a brother from another mother, Brian are here and we have been in competition now for the last two days going at it in 9 different events.

I'm so glad that you are here today with us as we worship a risen Savior Jesus Christ and as we come off the high of what was Pentecost Sunday and settle into ordinary time next week but we can't just skip right past Trinity Sunday. In churches where there are more than one pastor the senior pastor normally asks another pastor to preach on this Sunday. I don't have that luxury, nor would I want it.

We believe that what we do here matters. We hope and we pray that what we do here together as a community has an impact on the lives of individuals and on the life of this community. Every moment we spend together learning about the nature of God and celebrating accomplishments in graduations and commissioning people to do work overseas as ambassadors for Christ, saying goodbye to a beloved organist, all of this matters and has an impact on people and we hope leads people closer to Jesus. Today we are going to try to understand better, together, what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ and to believe in God as Lord and Savior within the framework of the Trinity. Yeah, that's a lot, let's see how it goes.

**READ**

I sound a bit like a broken record when I say that the Scripture we are looking at today comes once again through this 9 month Bible challenge that we are involved in together. So every time you see this heading in the bulletin you know that it is part of this Bible challenge that we are doing together. I have also mentioned that in our young adult Sunday School class we are learning about other religions and we are seeing that as we learn about other people and their way of life then our own way of living becomes clearer and what we believe and why we believe certain things become more defined and acute. It helps to understand what other people believe because it gives you a better understanding of what you believe as well.

So one of the things that we have seen is that the most defining feature of a Christian church is the Trinity. If a church does not believe in the Trinity then they simply are not a Christian church. That isn't a value judgment. In fact, sometimes it means the opposite. Some of the kindest, most loving people I know aren't Christian at all and wouldn't self-define as Christian. No Trinity, then no Christian, but can still be nice people, even nicer than Christians.

What we have seen is that this measuring stick of the Trinity is something that many who self-define as Christian do not believe such as Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons, and so that would leave them out of the definition of Christian. So, the Trinity is obviously something that is crucial in order to be able to define ourselves as Christian. If we do not understand what this Trinity is all about, well then we are missing out on one of the most fundamental and one of the most important Christian doctrines. So, since this is where you come to love each other and to love God, the better we understand the Trinity the better we can love God and so in turn love each other.

Fortunately for us Titus, probably one of the least preached from Books of the Bible next to Hezekiah, gives us a great roadmap to understanding the Trinity and so a great roadmap to understanding what we believe. Let's look at Titus. In these verses, which in some translations is just a single sentence, we find four basic fundamental truths about what we believe and they are given the general overarching framework of the Trinity. We find the basis of our belief which is mercy, the what of our belief which is rebirth and renewal, the means of our belief which is the Holy Spirit poured out richly upon us, and the goal of our belief which is eternal life. If you didn't get all four, don't worry, we are going to look at each one of them now.

Let's start in vs.5 and we will find the basis of our belief, which is mercy. We should know by now, even if this is your first Sunday here, that God's mercy is indisputable. Our first reading for this morning, Psalm 26:3 tells us that the steadfast love of God, the mercy of the Lord, the kindness of God is right before our eyes and in a way leads us as walk in faithfulness

with God. The mercy of God is that which leads us to trust in God and know that God is good all the time, all the time, God is good. If the God that we worship is full of mercy and we follow that God then we will reap the benefits.

You know, the characteristic traits of who you follow actually matters. It matters who your leader is. In this setting, the church, if I were to teach you to hate your neighbor, I had to think of something completely antithetical to what I hope you are hearing here, so if I were to teach you to hate your neighbor I would hope that most of you would leave this church, but some of you would stay because you are into hating your neighbor.

The character of the person we follow matters. The character of our leader matters. The character of God is that of mercy and so the basis of our belief is that of the mercy we have received from God, which ought to, in turn, make us merciful. The basis of our belief is the mercy of God which we have experienced personally.

Secondly, we see in vs.6 the what of our belief which is rebirth and renewal. At the root of rebirth and renewal is a current relationship with Jesus that allows you to know that you are forgiven and so you can forgive yourself and others. We are called to surrender a past that we can't change and trust God with the future that we can't control. Rebirth and renewal allows you to do that. If you are not born again then chances are that you are stuck in the past and not able to get beyond certain life events that weigh you down terribly.

Now rebirth and renewal also includes reconciliation for past injustices as well both on a personal and a national level. Rebirth and renewal requires that we live in the moment and not for the moment. There is a huge difference between the two. Don't live for the weekend, don't live for your one or two week vacation, don't live for the wedding day, don't live for quitting time, don't live for the end of the last class, don't live for graduation, don't live for this temporary life. It's one thing to plan, and be excited for something, but its another to live for it.

The rebirth we experience in Christ allows us to love and live in every moment. I've told you before that you will never find a Scripture where Jesus is in a hurry, he lives in every moment in which he finds himself. When you experience a rebirth and a renewal every person you encounter is the one that God has put in your life for that moment. You look every person that you encounter in the face, you are interested in them, they are special to you. That is what rebirth in Christ does for us today. This is the what of our belief.

In vs.6 we read about the means of our belief which is the Holy Spirit poured out richly on us. We experienced the outpouring of the Holy Spirit last week in communion and in the preached Word. We are experiencing the Holy Spirit in the explosion of our youth and

children's ministries so much so that we are praying to the Holy Spirit that he would provide more volunteers because he got us into this mess in the first place.

Let me ask you a question and I want you to answer it honestly. When was the last time that you experienced the power of the Holy Spirit personally? Maybe it was last Sunday. The Holy Spirit is the means through which our belief becomes efficacious and makes any difference at all in our lives.

Lastly, the goal of our belief is found in vs.7, and that would be eternal life. I probably preach too often about the importance of our faith here and now on our families, our church, our neighbor, our community. But heaven is not a place on earth no matter what Belinda Carlisle says. The most common time to think about eternal life is when we are faced with what? Death, that's right, its direct opposite, death. This week we are celebrating the resurrection of three people in a very short span of time. On Thursday we celebrated the resurrection of Dave Simmons, on Friday the resurrection of Scott Clement, Ryan Bressetts step-dad, and on Tuesday we celebrate the embrace of eternal life by Lois Anne Risser.

Even though we couch these events with celebration, death has a way of humbling us. The thought of our own mortality, or the mortality of loved ones, sobers us and causes us to think. It has a way of reminding us that we are more vulnerable, more fragile than we thought. Times like these hit us at our core, they interrupt our lives, the direction we've been traveling, and the way we've been spending them. In some ways they instinctively cause us, to reexamine us.

I hope today forces you to think about what you think about eternal life. We believe that eternal life can only be reached with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. No one comes to the father except by me, says our Savior. I believe that. That eternal life, as little as I may talk about it, is significant, it exists, and can only be reached by faith in Jesus.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, on this Trinity Sunday Titus makes it clear that the Triune God is fully present in the coming of grace. The Trinity is fully present in these verses. The Spirit was poured out on humanity as a result and consequence of the work of the Son on the cross, by the will of the Father. At the heart of the Trinity is the salvation of humankind. Amen.