

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Holy Trinity Sunday – June 7, 2020

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:20)

Although the doctrine of the Trinity is a great mystery, it has many practical implications for a Christian worldview. For one thing, it shows us that God is fully personal, and this fact makes Christianity distinct from other religions. Let’s see why this is so.

Essential to personhood is being related to other persons since relationships define who someone is. This is also true for divine persons. The Father is only Father in relation to the Son. The Son is only Son in relation to the Father. And the Holy Spirit is only Holy Spirit as the bond of love between the Father and the Son. Because of these relationships, the triune God is fully personal. He is personal through and through.

In contrast to the Trinity, however, Allah is impersonal since he is unrelated to anyone “prior to” creation. Moreover, in some schools of Hinduism, ultimate reality is explicitly impersonal. Here an impersonal substance creates and destroys the cosmos by cycles of expansion and contraction. Finally, in Buddhism ultimate reality is also explicitly impersonal with an impersonal process replacing the impersonal substance of Hinduism.

In non-Christian religions, an ultimate impersonalism prevails. As a result, personal realities like love, goodness, meaning, purpose, and knowledge have no root in the ultimate level of reality. In Christianity, by contrast, an ultimate personalism prevails since the entire creation is governed by the meaning and purpose of the fully personal, triune God. Hence, it makes sense to speak of personal realities like love, goodness, knowledge, etc. since they are rooted in the ultimate level of being. Of course, non-Christians also believe in these things, but they can do so only because they live in a world that is created and sustained by a fully personal God. So it is that only by faith in the ultimate mystery of the Trinity does created reality become less mysterious for us. This is the Christian worldview.

Prayer: Almighty God, cause us to see how your triune nature shapes every aspect of our thought and lives. Amen.

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June 14, 2020—Second Sunday after Pentecost

“When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matthew 9:36)

A pastor is a shepherd. His or her calling is to shepherd the flock. But it is not just pastors who are shepherds; we all have shepherding roles in various areas of our lives, including our church lives. As Lutherans, we confess that we believe in the priesthood of all believers, but we might also affirm the pastor-hood of all believers. How can we all be better shepherds?

Let’s consider pastors first. Shepherding has many aspects including the care and nurture of people, which many pastors do well. However, it also includes leading and protecting the flock, which many pastors fail at. There are two reasons for this failure: fear and ignorance. Many pastors are so afraid of conflict that they suppress truth to maintain peace. Second, in dealing with controversial issues, many pastors don’t know what the proper course of action is. Why? Because they don’t know how to apply God’s law, except to the most obvious issues of personal morality. For many, the law is just a theological set up for the gospel, not a moral guide for all of life.

But what about laypeople? They also have shepherding responsibilities. And often, they too are paralyzed by the same fear and ignorance. They avoid conflict like the plague, and don’t know how to adjudicate conflict Biblically. As a result, they contribute to the unhealthy dynamics of their churches, making it harder for their pastors to fulfill their shepherding obligations to them.

So, whether we are pastors or laypeople, let’s become better shepherds. Let’s nurture, guide, and protect others, especially in the midst of conflict. Conflict is a normal part of life; avoiding or suppressing it only makes it worse. But when we handle it properly, we all grow stronger. For this to happen, however, we must know how to adjudicate conflict Biblically and how to speak the truth in love.

Many people today are harassed like sheep without a shepherd. We have a gospel opportunity to serve others in the name of the Good Shepherd!

Prayer: Lord, give us the courage and the knowledge to handle conflict in a godly way that we might shepherd others.

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