

“More than Meets the Eye”

“If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death” (John 8:52).

Over the last year, a task force from the congregation has been working on a plan for restoring our sanctuary. To assist us with this project, a company from Milwaukee named Conrad Schmitt has been contracted to first help us understand the history of our building before moving forward with a plan for restoration. Old photographs of the church and congregational records from the last 146 years tell a big part of the story, but another important step in this process involves analyzing the paint used over the years to discover the true colors and designs that once decorated the interior walls of this building.

This week, one of the consultants from Conrad Schmitt began the process of stripping back the paint to create what are called “exposure windows.” As you look around the sanctuary today you’ll notice a number of spots on the walls and on one of the columns where the paint has been carefully removed to reveal patterns and hues from years gone by. These windows into our past enable us to look beyond what we can perceive on the surface and, if you take the time to view these areas, you’ll find that there is much more happening in the walls of our church than meets the eye.

Today, as we celebrate one of the most profound mysteries in the Christian faith in the doctrine of the Trinity, our Gospel reading from John also serves to reveal much more than meets the eye about our God. As the reading opens, Jesus is right in the middle of a fierce and heated debate with the Jews. It’s an argument that began back in verse 31 as Jesus spoke to these religious leaders about the Divine identity He shares with His Father. And then, as they demonstrate their complete lack of understanding, Jesus quickly turns His words into an attack on their unbelief, calling them children of the devil who desire no part of God’s Word. This accusation from Jesus leads right into the first verse of our reading as the Jews make their own accusation that Jesus is demon-possessed.

Then, like layers of paint coming off of ancient walls, Jesus begins to reveal the truth about who He really is. He tells them that He honors the Father because the Father has sent Him. He informs them that the Father glorifies Him and then, in a startling revelation that borrows language from the Old Testament story of God meeting Moses in the burning bush, Jesus announces that “before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58). In using these words, Jesus pulled back the curtain and showed them His true identity. “I am” was the unutterable name of God Himself and, not only was this claim, “more than meets the eye” for the Jews, the idea that Jesus was calling Himself God was more than they could take. They wanted to kill Him on the spot but, as they picked up the stones to end His life, John tells us that, “Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.”

In this bold confrontation with the Jews, Jesus had revealed in plain language that He and the Father are one. It was an unthinkable idea for the Jews in the temple on that day and, if we’re honest, the doctrine of the Trinity, revealing one God in three Persons, is difficult for us to understand as well...and yet, this is exactly the picture painted on the walls of Scripture throughout the ages. From the beginning, God had revealed Himself as the three-in-one, singular yet plural God whose, “Spirit hovered over the face of the waters” in the first chapter of Genesis; and who spoke in the act of creating mankind, “Let us make man in our image” (Genesis 1:26); and who describes the relationship within the Godhead in our Old Testament reading from Proverbs 8 as Jesus Himself – speaking here as wisdom personified – asserts, “When he established the heavens, I was there; when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the

earth...I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always (Proverbs 8:27-30). In other words, “before Abraham was...I AM!”

Not only does God’s Word give Jesus and the Holy Spirit divine names, we also see that throughout the pages of Scripture, the Son and the Spirit also do divine works. *This means they do the things that only God can do.* In today’s second reading from the book of Acts we see this very point made as Peter continues his Pentecost sermon proclaiming to the people that “Jesus of Nazareth...(did) mighty works and wonders and signs” and that the Holy Spirit, who raised Him to life, now empowers His followers to hear and believe... and these are the works of God!

You won’t find the word “Trinity” anywhere in the Bible and yet this word of the Church – this “three-in-one, singular yet plural, God in three persons” term “Trinity” is exactly the way God has revealed Himself to us in Scripture. And, as the ancient paint of reason and pride and sin are stripped away, we are left with the truth of a God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – who has created us and redeemed us and called us to life eternal. And *THIS* is why the doctrine of the Trinity matters!

In today’s Gospel, Jesus says, “Truly, truly I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death” (John 8:51). My friends, this is our treasure! This is our joy! This is the promise of God that changes everything for us! These are words spoken by our Savior about the work that He was sent by the Father to accomplish on the Cross and because Jesus endured the unbelief and rejection of men; because He fulfilled God’s Law perfectly in our place; because He suffered and died, assuming the penalty that we should have paid; and because He was raised to life by the power of the Holy Spirit; we will never see death! The Triune God has acted for us so we can live forever.

This week, we had members of our church family who experienced the death of loved ones; three of them were children. And this week, dozens of people were killed in the tornado that destroyed the town of Moore, Oklahoma. And each one of you here today could add your own example of how sin has wounded you this week.

My friends, in the midst of grief like this, the father of lies would have us turn inward. In the presence of pain like this, our sinful pride pushes us toward anger and indignation; in the wake of suffering like this, the world mocks our faith and challenges our hope. And yet, through our losses and in our pain, God is at work...stripping back the things that we have used to cover up our sin...exposing the flawed foundations on which we have built our trust...and God is also at work, leading us out of the shadow of death and into the light of life.

God only knows what the coming days will bring...*but He does know!* And in His Word He tells us that there is more than meets the eye. When Jesus says, “if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death...” He spoke the Word of the Father by the power of Spirit to bring us hope and point us to a future that we could never see or reach on our own.

The Word of God reveals more to us than meets the eye and as we allow the Word to work in our hearts; as we hear the life-giving message of a three-in-one God who “works all things together for good...for those He has called according to His purpose...” God is revealing a reality of forgiveness and reconciliation; He is showing us a life of community and love that mirrors His very essence and He is pointing us to a future where we will never see death! Amen.

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