

“Grace, Love, and Communion”

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 13:11-13, Matthew 28:16-20

Graphics: Trinity, circles

Big Truth: The Trinity is the divine embodiment of grace, love, and communion. As we worship, serve, and grow into the likeness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are called to receive and give grace, to love God and our neighbors, and be in communion with God and the world.

Focus Phrase: The Triune God is yearning to show you grace, to love you, and to commune with you.

1. Introduction

- A. **PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)**
- B. We’ve spent lots of time over the last few weeks talking about the Holy Spirit...worshipping and welcoming the Holy Spirit...being anointed in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. It’s been great...and last week’s reliving of the Pentecost Day was special.
- C. But TODAY on the Christian calendar, which is OUR calendar, is **Trinity Sunday**. Today, we - the Church - spend time worshipping God in three persons: Father, Son AND Holy Spirit.
- D. Now, as one of our Sunday School classes, who have been studying the Trinity, will tell you, understanding the doctrine (or beliefs) of the Trinity is not easy.
- E. Do we - will we - ever fully understand this wonderful doctrine of the Trinity? Probably not this side of heaven...but we still wrestle with what we believe and, more importantly, what to DO about that.
- F. There’s an ancient story about St. Augustine and it goes like this: *One day he took a break from writing about the Trinity to take a walk along the seashore. There he came across a child with a little pail, intently scooping up a pail full of water out of the ocean, then walking up the beach and dumping it out into the sand, then going back down to scoop out another pail of water to pour into the sand, etc. Augustine asked the child what he was doing, and the child explained that he was “emptying the sea out into the sand.” When the Bishop tried to gently point out the absurd impossibility of this task, the child replied, “Ah, but I’ll drain the sea before you understand the Trinity.”*
- G. King Duncan said, “There’s truth to that child's comment. We don't understand the Trinity, but we're ready to go to war to defend it. Well, maybe not anymore. But there was a time when battles were fought over church doctrine, and even today churches are being split over whose interpretation of the Word is correct. And it's tragic. (King Duncan, Collected Sermons, www.Sermons.com)
- H. The good thing is that today in worship, we won’t be starting any wars and I pray we can agree on Paul’s words to the Corinthians, and Jesus’ words to the disciples about the Trinity.

- I. For us, it's not just about understanding the doctrine of the Trinity, but about committing our lives to our response to the Triune God who gives us grace, loves us, and wants to be in relationship with us.
- J. Are you ready? Let's lose ourselves in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and then be equipped to live out our faith as we go out into the world.
- K. First, we'll get some commissioning from Jesus and then we'll dive deeper into Paul's final greeting to the Corinthians.
- L. Let's start in Matthew 28:16-20...turn with me there.

2. Scripture

A. READ Matthew 28:16-20

- i. Jesus clearly has a full understanding of the Trinity. Why? Because He's the second person OF the Trinity! We don't have that status, but we can begin to understand what Jesus wants us to DO because of the three natures or persons of the Trinity.
- ii. Jesus' command to the disciples was to, "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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded.**"
- iii. Jesus didn't necessarily expect his followers to fully grasp the Trinity...and the church has been wrestling with the doctrine of the Trinity for as long as there's been a church.
- iv. But just because something is difficult to understand, it doesn't mean that we shouldn't try and it also doesn't mean that we shouldn't respond to what we DO know.
- v. So, what do we know about the Trinity?
 - a. First, we know that the three person of the Trinity are **God the Father, God the Son Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit.**
 - b. Together, those three natures or persons are all One God.
 - c. The next thing we realize is that any metaphor we try to use to explain the Trinity falls very short in the end.
 - i) There's the ice, water, steam metaphor. Three states of H₂O, but all still exactly water.
 - ii) There's the egg metaphor - shell, yolk, and egg white. All distinct, but all one egg.
 - iii) Or the campfire metaphor - heat, light, and the physical fire itself.
 - iv) Helpful, but all have limitations.

- d. We also know that all three persons of the Trinity are eternal and were present prior to and at Creation.
- e. In the grand narrative of the Bible:
 - i) God the Father was the Creator of all things. The Nicene Creed says: *We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.*
 - ii) The Son Jesus Christ was begotten from the Father. Nicene Creed again: *We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father...*
 - iii) The Holy Spirit sent by the Father and the Son, is the real presence of God here and now. The Creed tells us this: *We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified...*
- vi. This is what the church believes - the doctrine - about the Trinity. Now, we could unpack this in a 10-week series, and maybe someday we will. But what does our understanding of the Trinity, as limited as it may be, mean for us and our lives as followers of Jesus and worshippers of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- vii. Let's turn our attention to the Apostle Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 13:11-13. Most scholars agree that Paul didn't have a robust Trinitarian theology. Paul seemed to be more focused on, "...Christ and him crucified..." But, as we'll see, he did indeed have a Trinitarian confession and understood the work of each person of the Trinity.
- viii. This is the final greeting from Paul to the church in Corinth. That church was a bit of a hot mess, as you can read more about this afternoon in the earlier chapters of 2 Corinthians. Paul leaves them with this...verse 11...

B. READ 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

- i. When I was growing up, whenever Mom and Dad were away for a day, they'd leave us a to-do list. Anyone else get those? The expectation was that the list would be completed by the time they returned. Now, they never said WHEN, right? Just "before we return." We would, of course, wait until the last second and as they were pulling in the driveway (we didn't have Find My Friends then), we would be going NUTS trying to finish the list - or at least make it APPEAR like we did.
- ii. Paul was not with the Church in Corinth, but left them a list of things to do:
 - a. Put things in order;
 - b. Listen to my appeal (or encourage each other)

- c. Agree with one another;
 - d. Live in peace.
- iii. If you do all those things, then, for sure, the God of love and peace will be with you. That echoes back to Jesus' words in Matthew 28, doesn't it? That He would, "...be with them always, even to the end of the age."
 - iv. I'm not sure what a "holy kiss" is exactly, but most scholars agree that this was a cultural greeting, similar to what we see in European and Middle Eastern cultures. It's a personal and intimate greeting to those with whom we are connected.
 - v. But it's Paul's last sentence that I want us to zero-in on this morning. His final farewell is this: **The GRACE of the Lord Jesus Christ, the LOVE of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with ALL of you.**
 - vi. Paul gave them a To-Do list, encouraging them to live in peace with one another, and that God would be with them...and adds an exclamation point by praying for GRACE, LOVE, and COMMUNION in their lives. That's the title of our message today.
 - vii. Let's see what each of those means:
 - a. First, **GRACE** is God's unmerited, freely bestowed gift of His favor in our lives. This GRACE of Jesus Christ (or some translations say the grace FROM Jesus Christ) is the favor we receive through the sacrifice of Jesus. Jesus took the punishment for all our sin on the cross and there's in nothing we can do to earn it or buy it or deserve it. So Paul prayed for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be for all.
 - b. Second, Paul prayed for the **LOVE** of God (or FROM God) to be experienced by all. In the Trinitarian formula, Paul is referring to God the Father here. In 1 John 4:7-8 it says, "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love." God is love...and loves like a parent to a child. Can we define love? Not very well, but we know it when we experience it, right?
 - c. Third, is the **COMMUNION** of the Holy Spirit to experienced by all. The Greek term he used is *koinonia*, which means fellowship, a sharing in community. This is a togetherness that binds us together in a deep spiritual way. This is that thing that happens when you meet a stranger for the first time, make some awkward small talk, and then find out that they're a believer...and then pretty quickly you sense a deep spiritual connection to this former stranger. The communion of the Holy Spirit.
 - viii. I pray the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ is given to you all. I pray the love of the Father is known by you all. I pray the koinonia of the Holy Spirit is

experienced for all of you. And as you receive those things, then the To-Do list gets a LOT easier to accomplish.

- ix. Paul knew that the church would never experience the ability to love each other and live in peace until they understood how deeply God wants to give the grace, love them, and be in relationship with them.
- x. I'm here this morning to tell you this (listen): **The Triune God is yearning to show you grace, to love you, and to commune with you, too.**

3. Application

- A. Yes...you! Even you...and me! Praise God! In a world, like Corinth, that is divided, sinful, broken, and filled with polarized politics - even in the church - the Triune God wants to pour into you - grace, love, and communion.
- B. Take a moment right now just to receive those three things into your life. And say thank you. Even as we struggle with fully understanding the Trinity, we know effect God has in our lives. When the wind blows, we can see the trees sway and hear the sound, but we can't see it or fully understand how wind works. Yet, we know it blows our hair, moves ships, and can even cause damage if strong enough. So, receive the evidence of the Trinity in your life right now - the love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the communion with the Holy Spirit.
- C. But guess what? Jesus' command in Matthew 28 is still on the table for us as His disciples...to make disciples, baptized people in the Triune names of God, and to teach people to obey Jesus commands and follow Him.
- D. There are countless programs and ministries in which we can engage to do that...classes and sermons and VBS and Sunday School and outreach and missions. The church doesn't have a shortage of WAYS to do that.
- E. Yet, no matter WHAT METHODS we use to accomplish the To-Do list, Paul is calling us to receive and give grace, to receive and give love, and to do all we do in the deep spiritual fellowship of the Holy Spirit.
 - i. You don't deserve Christ's favor...yet He gives it to you. And, you're called and commanded to give grace to each other and to all. When someone crosses you, forgive them. When you feel wronged by injustice, let Jesus take care of it. Practice not having to be right. Give grace.
 - ii. The Father's love is poured out into your life simply because He made you. Love God and love your neighbor in response. Love those who are different than you. Love those who have a different lifestyle or opinion on social media.
 - iii. The Holy Spirit is at work in your life and the life of every other person. Be in relationship with God and also with every person around you. Practice koinonia in here...and out there.

4. Conclusion

- A. Sometimes we're like that little child on the beach, emptying the ocean onto the sand and knowing that we'll accomplish THAT before we understand the Trinity. Yet, maybe it's more simple than we think.
- B. After I pray, we'll be coming to this Table this morning. A table that is open to all those who seek the grace of Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.
- C. Instead of preaching this morning, I could've just pointed to this table to said, "Here's what Paul meant. Here's what he wanted the Corinthians to know. Grace, given freely because of Jesus' sacrifice. Love, shown fully by a Father who created and provides for you. Fellowship (koinonia) through the Holy Spirit that connects us all together and to the Father and the Son. Here. This."
- D. Maybe that's the point today. Not fancy application points, but just one point: The Triune God meets us here, so that we can meet the world out there.
- E. The Triune God is yearning to show you grace, to love you, and to commune with you.
- F. Today, we get the opportunity to put our hands on it...our senses filled with it...and our lives changed by it.
- G. Let's pray and run to the Table!
- H. PRAY!**