

It is often said, and I know that I have started a few of my sermons in years past on Trinity Sunday by stating it, that Trinity Sunday is the most difficult Sunday for a pastor to preach on. I mean, how does one define this idea of 3 persons yet one God? It is a mystery and no amount of words can quite express it in its fullness because it is beyond our human understanding. It is something revealed to us and we accept it in faith. And I would think that many of you would agree that, even as essential as the Trinity is to Christianity, Trinity Sunday is the toughest Sunday in the Church year for worshippers and pastors.

But today I might very well say that as we approach our appointed Gospel text for today, that Palm Sunday is an even more difficult day for a pastor to preach on. I especially thought this as I sat on my back porch yesterday smoking a cigar and trying to put this sermon together. I do believe that this is the 14th time I have preached on Palm Sunday. And the only time that I have found it easy to write a sermon for this Sunday is if I focus on the triumphal entry -- on the palms and the crowds, on the donkey and the cheers of "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." But that is not the appointed text for today. The only time we actually hear that passage is in the Liturgy of the Palms which we did at the beginning of the service.

The reason I say that it is difficult is because, as Theological as the subject of the Trinity is, as 'conceptual' and 'mind-oriented' as the explanations of the Trinity might be so the Crucifixion account is the most real, so the Crucifixion is the most tangible and understandable, so the Crucifixion is the most 'heart' oriented and relatable to us. There is not a single one of us that is not touched in the deepest part of our hearts and souls with immense emotion and pain when hearing the Passion account that I read for the Gospel. And as the one who must read it, I have to say that it is the most difficult passage to get through every year. With as much joy I have because of the crucifixion I dread having to read the account aloud because it is so hard.

Furthermore, for the pastor, what more can be added to that which was preached by St. Matthew or the other Evangelists when they wrote it for us in their Gospel accounts? And while there are so many different avenues and parts of the passion account which a pastor can preach on it is difficult to do so without butchering the overall theme of the text and the day. But alas, to preach Christ crucified is the greatest gift one can be given. And today the words of St. Paul ring in my ears when he wrote in Romans chapter 5, *"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person*

someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:6-8)

I’m sure that we have all found ourselves at one point or another on the one-way street of love. By this I mean unrequited love. There have been times that we have loved someone who didn’t love us back. Despite our attempts at winning that person’s heart, despite our unending desires to hold that person, despite our always ‘ready-to-help’ attitude, the love we have for someone is not returned. We hope, we pray but to no avail. The other person seems to look right past you, ignore you, or perhaps put you down. The opposite can be true as well. Someone may love you or try to catch your eye but you don’t reciprocate. I can remember a girl that had an eye for me in middle school. Of course I didn’t know it at first and I didn’t feel any puppy love for her. If anything, I felt the opposite. But despite my attempts to thwart her fancies she came back over and over and over again. Unrequited Love!!

This is the type of love that we witness in the events of Christ’s passion in our Gospel lesson. As St. Paul said in our Epistle lesson from Philippians chapter 2, Christ humbled Himself and become man. For what purpose? That His people could see the fullest revelation of God. The Son of God walked the earth in ministry for three years. For what reason? That His followers might be drawn to God through His teaching. Jesus healed many that were lame, burdened, and cast down. Why? That they might experience the power and grace of God. Christ died on the cross. For what end? That man might have reconciliation and peace with God.

Everything that Christ did was to teach, show, and express the Love of God for His creation. Time and again throughout Scripture we are shown and told of God’s love - of Christ’s love.

But the love that He has for us is, in this sinful world, unrequited. After all the healings, after the tears of sympathy, after the words of wisdom, after the spiritual feedings, the people turned against Christ. Judas his disciple betrayed Him. Peter His disciple denied Him. As John says in the opening of His Gospel, *“He came unto His own and His own received Him not”*.

Today and this entire week is one of contrast and tension. We began today with a joyous attitude outside with the liturgy of the palms. Our Processional hymn was upbeat. But so soon as the Gospel procession the story and the tone changes. Instead of hugs and kisses of thankfulness, instead of faithfulness and obedience the people

change their song of hope to chant cries of “Crucify Him!! Crucify Him!!” And even we share in that chant. On Good Friday a part of our service here at St. Matthias are the reproaches. They heighten the tension of the crucifixion by setting against each other the good gifts God has given to us with the brutal actions of man against our Savior.

In short they draw our minds to understand that He loves us but that we have turned from Him. He comforts us but we have attacked Him. He says, “Father forgive them” but we have mocked Him. He offers us a robe of righteousness but we have stripped Him naked. He grants us a crown of glory but we have scarred him with a crown of thorns. He exalts the lowly but we have lifted Him up upon a cross. He feeds us with heavenly food but we have given him vinegar and gall to drink. He touches us with a gentle touch but we have driven nails through His palms. He gives the sinner life but have we murdered our Savior.

It’s almost unimaginable to think that Christ could love those that did and do these things to Him. One would think that in the midst of the painful and excruciating ordeal Christ would have said, “Enough is enough!! I’m Done!! You have shown yourselves for who you are. You reject me now I reject you!!” But He didn’t say that. He didn’t even think it. He loved us that much. He loved us that much that while we were yet sinners He died for us.

I admit that there are times when the pressures and situations of this sinful world weigh us down. There are times when we think that God has abandoned us and we think, “My God, my God why have you forsaken me?” There are times when our worldly demands cause us to think of our relationship with God as something almost inconsequential or in some conceptual way. All too often we might take what was done for granted, forgetting all too easily the Lamb that was freely offered up and slain for us.

I mean, we all being removed 2000 years from the event, and even we as pastors whose lives are devoted to the preaching of the Gospel, can wander away from Calvary. We can engross ourselves in so many other things and aspects of life that the cross becomes a blurry and dulled vision in the back of our minds.

But thankfully we have this week and, in reality, every week with the Sacrament to draw us again to the foot of that old rugged cross. When we have doubts, when we are unsure of God’s love for us we make our journey to the cross. It is as though God transports us to the cross to behold our Savior stricken and beaten, suffocated as he hung and says to us, “Look there! Look at this! Look at the Incarnate Christ.. Hear **His**

words of “My God, My God” and then hear his words... “Father forgive them.” That is how much I love you. That is what I was willing to do to forgive you. That is what I was willing to sacrifice in order to make you my mine.” *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son... that whosoever believes in Him shall not die... but have everlasting life.”*(John 3:16). John said again in his first epistle, *By this we know love, that^(AG) he laid down his life for us, and^(AH) we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.* 1 John 3:16

Last week we were privileged to have the Bishop preach the word of God as he will do again next Sunday on Easter. And the main point of his sermon when focusing on John chapter 8 was to say that God was in our midst when Jesus said “Before Abraham was, I Am”. And further, he referenced that phrase which I have used so many times in my sermons and is found over and over again in the Scriptures – “I will be your God and you will be my people.” The Bishop worded it this way - “God is making for Himself a people.” That is the overarching theme of all Scripture from Adam and Eve to Christ, from the very first chapter of Genesis to the very last chapter of Revelation.

And while Christ’s words in last week’s text pointed to God being “in our midst” so this week the crucifixion account shows us in actions and not just words exactly what He did to make us His one people. The immense love shown to us by Christ in His passion is not only a conceptual idea but a real bond. The cup of death which Christ drank on our behalf has united us as brothers and sisters.

Those who were here these past few Wednesday for Lent heard me say this type of statement a few times. And you may recall that I said, “While we have individual relationships with God the real focus is the greater body and family into which God has called us. And in coming “home” to our family we find enjoyment and refreshment.”

Brethren, we are not just a group of families but one family – The family of God. And we love and serve one another as Christ loved us. That is the type of relationship we experience when we, as the people of God, gather at the foot of the cross. His blood is the familial blood that binds me to you and you to me and we to Christ.

This truth has been running through my mind again and again over the past several weeks. This Lent, especially, my eyes have been fixed upon the Cross of Christ. But in so viewing our Savior’s love for us I have, by natural extension, been thinking wholeheartedly upon my family – upon you and all others who have embraced Christ as their

Savior. As Christ has loved me so I love you and it is my hope that we all endeavor to share that love one with another and with all who Christ calls into our life.

There is a hymn which our dear Brother Andrew has used in his prayers over and over again which sings its tune to us when we gather at Calvary. And Andrew, here it is in part:

“There is fountain of blood filled from Emmanuel’s veins... and all sinners plunged beneath that flood... lose all their guilty stains. Ever since, by faith, I saw the stream Thy flowing wounds supply... Redeeming love has been my theme, and **shall be** till I die.”

Amen.