

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Holy Trinity Sunday
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Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft
Simple truths from the Triune God

¹In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him stood the seraphim. Each one had six wings. With two they covered their faces. With two they covered their feet. With two they flew. ³One called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Armies! The whole earth is full of his glory! ⁴The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of the one who called, and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵Then I said, "I am doomed! I am ruined, because I am a man with unclean lips, and I dwell among a people with unclean lips, and because my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Armies!" ⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me, carrying a glowing coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs. ⁷He touched my mouth with the coal and said, "Look, this has touched your lips, so your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven." ⁸Then I heard the Lord's voice, saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here I am. Send me!"

· – Isaiah 6:1-8 EHV

Growing up, I loved math. When I was in middle school and high school, algebra and geometry were wonderful and straightforward ways to solve problems and get answers. As I advanced in high school, stoichiometry was my favorite part of chemistry. I enjoyed calculating balanced chemical equations. Early in high school, I indicated I wanted to either be an actuarial scientist, use math to measure risks, or be a math teacher.

This love for math was soon halted, though, as I approached calculus. Calculus is often considered a very difficult branch of mathematics. For me, it was the level and branch that killed my desire to pursue a career in math.

Why talk about math today on Holy Trinity Sunday? Well, Calculus was beyond my comprehension as a seventeen-year-old. On Holy Trinity Sunday, we get to consider theological math that does not necessarily add up. When I studied calculus, I struggled to solve differential equations. The problem, however, was not with calculus. My limited capacity was the problem. The theological math of the Holy Trinity is similar in that the problem is not with the math. Our understanding is the problem. The nature of our God is not irrational. The nature of our God is "super"-rational. God is so great that he is beyond our comprehension.

On Holy Trinity Sunday, we consider the theological math that God is three persons, yet one God. One Father and one Son and one Holy Spirit does not equal three gods, but one God. This should not be frustrating to us. This is comforting. We, who have limited capacity for understanding, can find comfort in the fact that our God is beyond our comprehension. If I can't understand calculus, why would I be able to understand the God who created math?

God's triune nature is hard for us to understand. Yet, the Triune God has revealed to us some simple truths about himself. These are seen in the calling of Isaiah. There are the truth of his holiness, the truth of his cleansing, and the truth of your purpose in him. These are simple truths from the Triune God.

At the beginning of this text, Isaiah sees a vision of our Triune God. God is seated on his throne. Isaiah sees God wearing a robe that fills the temple. Also, Isaiah sees seraphim. Evidently, seraphim are a type of angel. This name is only given to them in the book of Isaiah. Based on this description, their function

seems like the cherubim, angels who were stationed as God's honor guard. This name in Hebrew means "burning ones." These seraphim have six wings.

As these angels flew, they spoke to one another, saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Armies! The whole earth is full of his glory!" This phrase made the foundations of the temple's threshold shake. With this powerful phrase repeated in Revelation and sung in our worship, let's break it down.

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Armies!" The Word for holy means separate. God's holiness is that he is separated from all sin and evil. The threefold repetition of the term is an indication of the triune nature of God. The Father is holy. The Son is holy. The Spirit is holy.

The angels also say, "The whole earth is full of his glory!" The word for glory is the "heaviness" or "greatness" of God. The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. The glory of the Lord filled the temple. Here, the angels say, "The whole earth is full of his glory." The God who is triune is also everywhere.

Beug in the presence of the glory of the holy God terrifies Isaiah as he is an unclean man from an unclean people. Since God is holy, meaning he is separated from sin, unclean people, or sinners, and those who associate with other sins should not feel at ease coming into the presence of the holy Triune God.

How can we think of God's holiness? Well, let's dive back into mathematics for a moment. An asymptote is a line that continues with a curve, never reaching it. The curve approaches it toward infinity, but the two never meet. God is like the asymptote, and sinners are like the curve. Because of God's holiness, sinners cannot approach the holy God. God is far more separated from sin than the asymptote and the curve. God is holy. Sinners cannot approach the holy God.

Mathematics may not be simple. Our God may not always be easy to comprehend as well, but the simple truth is that the Triune God is holy. Therefore, we need to ask, do we regard him as holy? We live in a culture in which understanding the unapproachable nature of God may be hard to grasp. Listen to how St. Paul describes him, "the blessed and only ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or is able to see. To him be honor and power forever! Amen." (1 Timothy 6:15b, 16) He lives in unapproachable light. In the Old Testament Scriptures, one thing was simply stated. Sinners could not just come into the presence of the holy Triune God. When Moses stood before God's presence in the burning bush, he was told to take off his sandals, for he stood on holy ground. When Joshua stood before the Commander of the Army of the Lord, he was told to also take off his sandals because he stood on holy ground.

Do we approach God with the same reverence and awe? Because of God's holiness and our sins, we should not be able to come into his presence. Yet, today, here we are. We are gathered in the presence of the holy Triune God. God is with us as we gather. God comes to us through his Word. The Holy Spirit is in and among us. As we gather in this sanctuary on Sundays, we gather in the presence of the Holy God. Does this strike us?

Perhaps we take this all too lightly at times. Let us not sinfully fail to view God as holy and irreverently approach this God. Let us not also disrespect his name. Let us not desecrate where he dwells, such as his temple of our bodies. If we fail to regard God as holy, we are sinning. Sin cannot stay in the presence of the holy God.

The solution to the problems of failing to regard God as holy and our sin is seen with the second simple truth here: the truth of the cleansing the Triune God gives. Isaiah recognized that as a sinner, he should not be in the presence of the holy Triune God. Yet, God has a wonderful solution for him. One of the seraphim takes glowing coal from the altar in the temple, and he touches Isaiah's lips with it.

Then, the angel tells Isaiah this wonderful message, "Look, this has touched your lips, so your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven." Isaiah's sin was the reason he could not stand in the presence of the holy Triune God. So, God sent the messenger to bring to him a message of his forgiveness.

So, let's think of a simple math equation to illustrate this truth of God's cleansing. Perfection plus no sin equals eternal life. The problem is we have no perfection and many sins. This equation results in eternal death. Ultimately, a person with negative perfection with an addition of sins cannot come into God's presence. Yet, God has a variable to add to this equation. God's cleansing is like an infinite subtraction. Through the life and death of Jesus, the Triune God removes our sins.

You know sinners cannot simply come into the presence of the holy God. Yet, today, let me share this simple truth with you. The truth is that of God's cleansing. The Triune God provides you with the forgiveness of all your sins.

Immediately after humanity fell into death and destruction, therefore destroying their union and communion with God, the Triune God made a wonderful promise. He then followed through on this promise to deliver to you forgiveness. The Father sent His only-begotten Son to live, die, and rise for you. He did this to pay the debt of your sins and remove your guilt. Then, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. He works through the means of grace, which are the Word and Sacraments, to deliver to you this forgiveness of sins. Your sins are forgiven. You are even forgiven for failing to recognize the holiness of God. You are now able to come into his presence. You will stand in his presence forever in heaven.

The simple truth of the Triune God's cleansing then moves us into our purpose in him. After God cleansed Isaiah, he sent him out. Here is the truth or your purpose in the Triune God. After the seraphim touched Isaiah's lips with the glowing coal and proclaimed to him that his sins were forgiven, Isaiah heard the Lord call out, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" Again, we hear a nod to the Triune nature of God in this phrase as he says "I" and "us." Isaiah then responds, "Here I am, send me." The holy Triune God forgave Isaiah's sins and gave him an important purpose as he sent him out to work for him.

Learning the simple and complex truths of God is like taking math classes. One could stay in the classroom and keep these thoughts simply in theory. Yet, mathematics is a measurement of how things actually work. This knowledge is to be applied to our lives. Similarly, one could learn the simple and complex truths of our Triune God for purely academic purposes, yet he would be failing to understand the importance that our relationship with God is to be lived out. Theology is not just a class. This is the study of the God of the universe. We then apply this knowledge as we live our lives in him. The truth is that the Triune God has a purpose for you.

Just as the Triune God sent Isaiah out to proclaim his Word, he also sends us out. He has commissioned his Church to proclaim the message of salvation to all nations. Jesus said to his disciples, as representatives of the church, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." (Mark 16:15). One of God's purposes for you is that you all go and proclaim his message of the cleansing of sin and life eternal in Jesus.

Let us all see that the Triune God has this purpose for us as people who are cleansed by the blood of Jesus. Then, let us go and share the message of forgiveness with our friends, relatives, and neighbors. Invite people to join us for church on Sunday. Invite families to check out Emmanuel Lutheran School. Carry out this purpose and mission that the Triune God has for us.

Perhaps studying the nature of God can seem as complex as mathematics at times, yet our Triune God has shared some simple truths with us. The Triune God is holy. Sinners cannot just come into his presence. The Triune God cleanses sinners through the blood of Jesus. Forgiven of our sins, we have a right relationship with God. The Triune God has a purpose for us. This purpose is to share the message of his cleansing with the world. Amen.