

6.4.2023 Trinity Sunday (John 3:14-15)

Book 4 of *Mere Christianity* is titled: *Beyond Personality, or First steps in the Doctrine of the Trinity*. It's there that C.S. Lewis wrote these words, "All sorts of people are fond of repeating the Christian statement that 'God is love'. But they seem not to notice that the words 'God is love' have no real meaning unless God contains at least two Persons. Love is something that one person has for another person. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, He was not love."

The doctrine of the Trinity distinguishes Christianity from every other world religion, and Lewis' statement reveals the magnitude of this separation. While other religions speak of God's love for humanity, it is through our understanding of one God in three distinct Persons that Christians are able to make the powerful declaration that God doesn't simply love people, "*God is love*" (1 John 4:8). The very essence of God is love, and His everlasting love (a love that has no beginning or end) must find its origin in Him, in the eternal, perfect and personal union that exists between the Father and the Son through the Spirit, for as Lewis points out, love is relational. Love cannot exist without an object to love.

When we consider the doctrine of the Trinity from a personal, relational perspective, we are reminded that the Bible is not a scientific textbook, but a love story, and this story tells us that from the beginning, and for all eternity, these three distinct Persons exist in this perfect and personal relationship. So, as we seek to understand the Almighty and Triune God we begin to understand Him as a God for others, and the perfect way He loves another, the perfect way He loves us, is made known to each of us individually and intimately through His Word, His Beloved Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.

It is Jesus, *the Word made flesh* (John 1:14), *Emmanuel, God with us* (Matthew 1:23), who perfectly reveals God to us. As He said to Philip, "*Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father*" (John 14:9), and with that truth in mind, the truth that our Savior Christ is "*the image of the invisible God*" (Colossians 1:15), let's consider one word from today's Gospel, a word our Lord used that reveals His heart, and therefore reveals the heart of Almighty God. The word is "*must,*" and we find it in the Gospel we read this

morning when Jesus said to Nicodemus, “*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life*” (John 3:14-15).

The word *must* speaks of perfect obedience, the Son of man *must* be lifted up on the Cross at Calvary, and *must* is a word often used by our Lord to reveal His obedience to His mission “*to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Luke 19:10). We see this for the first time when Jesus was just a twelve-year-old boy at the Temple. You’ll remember the story of Mary and Joseph searching for Him in Jerusalem, and when they finally found Him at the Temple, He asked them, “*Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?*” (Luke 2:49). The obedient Son of God *must* be in His Father’s house and about His business, He *must*, as He said in another passage, “*work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day...*” (John 9:4), and that work which the Father sent Him to accomplish is defined in another verse, yet again using the word *must*. St. Matthew wrote, “*From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised*” (Matthew 16:21).

When we gather these verses together, verses that span our Lord’s life here from age twelve at the Temple to age thirty-three on the Cross, when we consider the nature of those things that God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, repeatedly declares He *must* do, we see the wisdom in C.S. Lewis’ approach to explaining and defending the doctrine of the Trinity, not through a series of theological arguments, but by telling a love story, for *God is love*. At the Temple in Jerusalem it was love, in human flesh, that *must* be about His Father’s business. It was love that *must* work the works of Him who sent Me. It was love that *must* go to Jerusalem, that *must* suffer many things, that *must* be killed, and it was love that *must* be raised on the third day, because “*Love never fails*” (1 Corinthians 13:8). God never fails.

All sorts of people are fond of repeating the Christian statement that ‘God is love,’ but as C.S. Lewis explains, that statement can only be true if God is personal, because “love is something that one person has for another person.” Which means, God is not some distant and impersonal cosmic force, but instead, by His very nature, God is a God whose perfect will is always

directed toward the good of His beloved. Our Savior Christ perfectly manifested that truth by coming down from heaven to do His Father's will, for the sake of His beloved. He came, as He said, not "*to be served, but to serve*" (Mark 10:45), "*not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me*" (John 6:38), and in the Gospel we read today there is another word that presents us with a beautiful image of the Father's will, and the infinite depth of God's love not for the few, but for the world.

The word is *whosoever*, and we find it written in the same verse: "*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*" The word *whosoever* is used in this verse to declare the truth that there are no limits to God's Divine compassion. The offer of abundant, eternal life in perfect union with the Father, through the Spirit, is given to *whosoever* believes in the Son. There is nothing that excludes even the most miserable offender from coming to Christ for forgiveness and healing and intimate, personal communion with the Triune God of Heaven and Earth, and the way that God forgives, the way that He longs to love *whosoever* comes to Him, is, as you know, so contrary to our experience in this world.

I remember hearing a story which illustrates that truth well. The story was about the great mutiny that occurred in India in the year 1857, when Indian soldiers rose up against their British commanders. When this mutiny was brought to an end, and peace was being negotiated between the government and those who had rebelled, the Queen sent out a proclamation which stated that all who laid down their weapons, and came to an appointed place by a certain time, would receive forgiveness, with some exceptions. Of course, there would be exceptions. There would be those who would be put to death, because in our brokenness we place conditions on the forgiveness we offer. We choose who we will, and who we will not love, but God doesn't work that way, for Divine love knows no exceptions. Therefore, when we are tempted to withhold love and forgiveness, we must be mindful of the truth that Divine love lives in us, and Divine love knows no exceptions.

Lewis was correct, love is something that one person has for another person, and when we consider the truth that God the Father sent His Son, and the Son, through the Spirit, accomplished all that He *must* do, and *must* suffer, in

order to give eternal life without exception, to *whosoever* calls upon His name (Romans 10:13), when we consider the story of our Salvation, we see that love is not only something one person has for another person, love is something that one God in three Persons has for another person, for *God is love*, and you are His beloved.