

“Guiding Us in The Truth”

Dear friends, Greetings this morning in the name of our Lord Jesus.

Before turning to our text, I want to (start today) by saying a word of thanks to you, (members of St. Timothy's) for the support you have given to your pastors (over the years). In particular, after every seven years, for the chance you give (to us) to take a sabbatical break, which I'll be starting next week. The intent is to be able to step away from the regular work we do and to spend some focused time on study and preparation, as well as a chance for rest and renewal. The hope (in giving us these breaks) is that we'll come back renewed and refreshed and better prepared to serve.

The normal pattern is to take the 12-week break all at once. But I've asked, and the Church Council has approved, that I be able to spread those weeks (over the next three summers) to take advantage of a study program at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN, specifically designed for pastors serving congregations. The plan is to spend the month of June, beginning next week (and in each of the following two summers), working on a Doctor of Ministry degree in Biblical Preaching. Between summer classes, (during the year), I'll be working on a few projects here at the church that relate to the normal work I do. Thus, the 12-week sabbatical will be spread over three years, as will the course of study.

Now, some of you have asked if I have a goal in mind with this advanced degree. (Fifty-something years old? Where are you going with this? And that's a good question.) The answer is “yes.” I do. The goal I have in mind, (my hope for this program of study) is to be encouraged in what I'm doing (as a preacher), to gain some new insights (and skills) in how best to speak and to share the word of God, and to continue growing as a preacher, with the hope of continuing to serve this congregation for as long as (you) and the Lord allow.

And so, (with all of that in mind), I ask for your prayers (during this time away) as I begin this course of study, as well as for Pastors Jim & Judy as they continue to serve. And, once again, thanks for the opportunity you've given.

Let's turn to our text. Today is Trinity Sunday. It's a day when we remember the work of our God as a Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and the way in which this Triune God (this three-in-one), leads and guides us in the truth.

Now, if you remember your church history, you know that the church (from early on) has tried to find ways to talk about this (concept of a Trinity) that make sense and (that help us) get our hands around what it really means. But because God is God, and because human words can never fully describe what's Divine, the best we can do is to give examples that help us think about how it all works.

Some of the early church fathers (for example) would talk about God and compare (what God is like) to a tree. They said, “Look at a tree, (if you want to understand God). There is the root, the trunk, and the fruit.” The root, (they said) is like God the Father, invisible, but you know he's there. The trunk is like God the Son, sent by the Father (into the world), visible and tangible for us to see and to know. And the Holy Spirit is like the branches and the fruit. We are connected to Christ (through the Holy Spirit), who enables us (in our lives) to bear the fruit we do.

Or (they would say), look at a stream. The water (in a stream) rises from a source, but the source is (more often than not) hidden. God the Father is the source, (hidden from our sight). Jesus the Son is the stream, (flowing from the one from whom he was sent). And the stream, (as it moves into the fields and enables the plants to grow), that's what the Holy Spirit does.

Or (they'd say) look at the light that comes from the sun. The sun is the source of light, but we see it when it breaks through the clouds (in beams), and we feel it when it strikes our skin and gives us warmth. So, the sun (in the sky) is like the Father, the beams like Jesus, and the warmth like the Holy Spirit.”

Now, the reality is that we'll never be able to fully understand and to talk about God. All of those (at best) are only examples of how God works. John Wesley (once said), “Show me a worm that can

comprehend a human being, and I'll show you a human being that can comprehend the Triune God." Luther said something that was even more to the point. He said, "To try to understand the Trinity endangers your sanity." (And I believe he was right.)

The best we can do, (a tree, a stream, the sun), is to take what we know (about God) and put (what we know) into language that helps us understand, that gives us a way to think about God, to talk about God, and to (begin to understand) what God has told us about himself. (And that's what this Trinity Sunday is about.)

"Guiding Us in The Truth." Today's lesson, taken from the sixteenth chapter of John's gospel, comes from a larger section (we've been looking at now for the last few weeks) in which Jesus is telling His disciples what to expect (what's going to happen) after He dies, is raised from the dead, and returns into heaven to be with His Father.

Now, if you were here last week, you remember we celebrated the Day of Pentecost, the day in which God sent his Holy Spirit to empower those early disciples, and to begin to create (and to form) the church. And we said that Pentecost wasn't just an event that happened long ago, in the lives of those early followers, but it's an event that happens now, (in our lives), here today, as we allow the Spirit of God to work and as we listen to what the Spirit of God has to say.

Today's passage picks up on some of the same ideas (same themes). It speaks of the work of the Holy Spirit and of the promise Jesus gives us of the Spirit's presence in our lives. More specifically, it helps us understand the importance of God working in our lives (as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) to lead us and to guide us in the truth.

Let's talk for a moment about truth. Pilate asked that question years ago, "What is truth?" How do you know something's true? How do you know when (and what) to believe? Is it true because someone said it, because you read it in the newspaper, saw it on television, on-line? How do you know something's true? And how do you know when it's not?

I read a story (this past week) about a 14-year-old Junior High student in Idaho Falls that won first prize in the Greater Idaho Falls Science Fair by showing how conditioned we have become to believing what we read, especially if it has (some kind of) scientific connection. In his project, he urged people to sign a petition demanding strict control or total elimination of the chemical "Dihydrogen monoxide."

It said he put together a list of why people should sign such a petition. (And he came up with quite a list.) It said accidental inhalation (of this substance) can kill you. It said it contributes to the erosion of our natural landscape. It said it decreases the effectiveness of automobile brakes. It said it's even (often) found in cancerous tumors.

And it said he asked 50 people if they would support a ban on dihydrogen monoxide. (Do you know what he found?) 43 said yes. 6 were undecided. And only 1 said no (actually knew what it was) that the chemical (being described), "Dihydrogen monoxide," is water.

It's true. Go on their website and you can even buy a T-shirt that says "Our T-shirts are 100% DHMO free." (Of course they are.) Have you ever tried wearing a T-shirt made of water?

What is truth? (How do you know if something's true.) Pilate asked that question years ago. People are asking the same question today. And (today) not only what is it, (what is truth), but does it exist? Is there anything that's true (that's absolute) in this world, upon which you can depend? And if there is, how do you know?

In the story today, Jesus said, "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when the Spirit of Truth comes, (he said), he will guide you into all the truth." In other words, (Jesus says) if you listen to the Spirit, you'll come to know the truth. If you listen to the Spirit, you'll come to know (the one) who is the truth.

Our first lesson today was from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs was written by King Solomon, one of the wisest men who ever lived. It's a passage that talks about wisdom. And not about wisdom (in general), but about the wisdom of God that has been in place from the beginning of time.

It says, "The Lord brought me forth (talking about wisdom) as the first of his works...I was

appointed from eternity, from before the world began. (It says) When there were no oceans, I was given birth. When he set the heavens in place, established the clouds, marked out the foundations of the earth, I was the craftsman at his side, rejoicing in the plan and purposes being put into place.”

Solomon says that the wisdom of God was behind everything that was created. (He says) the wisdom of God brought this world into being, (even your life).

Now, we’re talking today (not about wisdom), but about truth. But there’s an inherent connection between the wisdom of God (that brought this world into being) and the truth of God revealed (to us) in his Son and made known (to us) through his Spirit.

“I have much more to say to you (Jesus said) than you can now bear. But when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide into all the truth.” How do you know something’s true? How do you know that what you believe (about God) is the truth?

Do you want to know the truth about God? (I’ll tell you something.) I’m not convinced that people today (want to know) the truth about God? (I’m really not.) You look at what’s happening in people’s lives (these days), some of the patterns and priorities they set? (Rarely, if ever, reading the Bible. Coming to church only when it fits into a schedule. Praying as a last resort.) Those aren’t patterns and priorities seeking the truth, but one’s that (don’t want to know) what’s true.

Jesus said, “If you continue in my word you will know the truth.” People think they know the truth (about God and about how it all works) and about what’s wise in this life. But they’re not spending the time to find out, to figure it out, and to allow the Spirit of Truth to do its work.

It’s like the story of the preacher and the astronomer. (Maybe you’ve heard that story?) The preacher and the astronomer were talking about their lines of work and about how (each one) said he knew enough about (what the other was doing) to not have to dig any deeper.

The astronomer said, “I don’t need religion. I don’t need to go to church. I learned it all as a kid.” (He said), “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” (He said), “That’s my religion.” (He said), “What else do I need to know?”

The pastor said, “It’s the same thing with astronomy. Same thing when I was young.” (He said), “Twinkle, twinkle, little star. How I wonder what you are.” (He said), “What else is there?”

Guess what. They both were wrong, (the astronomer and the preacher). They both thought they had it figured out. But (the truth was) neither one had a clue. To understand the truth, you have dig deeper, allow the Spirit (of God) to work in your life.

It’s like what happens with our children as they’re growing. When they’re young, there’s only so much they can understand. And so we start (by giving them) the basics and (from there) we build upon what they’ve learned. And as they grow, they continue to learn. And as they learn, they come to know what’s true.

It’s the same thing in the Christian life. (It’s the same thing in your life.) Paul talks about how we start out as little babes, eating soft and easily digestible (spiritual) food. But as we grow, we learn to eat food with more substance. And as we begin to eat (more solid) spiritual food, that’s when we come to know what’s true.

Do you want to know what God wants in your life, the truth about what God wants in your life? The Bible says, “God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (And it says) “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and (your life), the man Jesus Christ.”

I’m not convinced people (these days) want to know the truth? Because the truth means they would have to change. The truth means they would have to begin to trust. And not (trust) in themselves, but in God. And not just in God (in general), but in what God has said and done (and revealed to us) through the Holy Spirit, in his Son, Jesus Christ.

J. B. Phillips, one of the more well-know Christian scholars and translators of (the 20th century), spoke about how (in our country) we’re living on (what he called) “the spiritual capital of the past.” He said, (and I quote) “Our society bears all the marks of a God-starved community, because no ultimate authority or truth is acknowledged or known.” As a result (he said), “Many people see little ultimate

purpose in life, holding on (without much reason or hope) to what they hope will end up being a good life” (end of quote).

P. T. Forsyth, one of the great Scottish theologians from the (early 20<sup>th</sup> century) said something similar. He said, “Unless there is within us that which is above us, we will soon yield to that which is about us...Unless there is within us that which is above us, we will soon yield to that which is about us.” I like that, (sounds prophetic), written more than 90 years ago, but it could have been written today.

I came across an interesting article (this past week) that was describing what happens whenever a large ship enters the harbor. When it gets close to shore, (it said), it’s time to dock, it takes on board what is called a harbor master.

A harbor master is one who knows the harbor. He knows the length of it. He knows the depth of it. He knows the tides and currents, how strong they are and which direction they flow. When the harbor master comes on board, he takes control of the ship, and he gives orders to the captain who (from that point on) does what he’s told. He is (if you will) an outside expert who is brought in to make sure the ship docks safely.

As I read that article, I couldn’t help but think that that’s what it’s like with the Holy Spirit. That’s how God works in our lives to lead us and to guide us through life. He’s given us a harbor master (his Spirit) who knows the currents and the tides, the hazards and the flow of this life, (what to expect). And he’s there to guide you and to lead you and to bring you safely home, if only you’ll be wise (in your life) and open yourself to the truth, and to the one who is the Truth.

Jesus said, “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”

And so it is, my friends, that God carries out his work in us. Not always easy to understand, (easy for us to follow), but as wise and as true as anything we’ll ever find. Three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And (all) with one purpose: to lead us and guide us to Christ. Amen.