

The Feast of The Holy Trinity – 2021

Isaiah 6:1-8

Acts 2:14a, 22-36

John 3:1-17

Do you identify yourself with Christ? Is “Christian” one of the first descriptors you use when someone asks you to tell them about yourself? Have you been born again? Have you been born from above?

The reasons why people elect not to be followers of Christ are too numerous to count. One of the foremost, one the basic reasons is a supposed autonomy. “I’m my own man.” “I don’t need anyone telling me what I can or can’t do.” “I’m the master of my own domain.” Here’s another reason, straight from the Gospel of John: “(Jesus said) this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their works were evil” (John 3:19). Some folks prefer the pigpen. When Jesus said that people loved darkness rather than the light, He wasn’t just speaking about Bonny and Clyde types – He was speaking about simple sinners who won’t repent, people who prefer their domain of darkness because it is “their” domain of darkness.

Do you believe that Jesus had to die? The Son of God was lifted up and exalted, lifted up by His Father to a royal throne, a wretched cross – was that the only way to save sinful you? Is the crucified King the only life-line that you have to save you from death? Do you believe that Jesus had to die... in precisely the way that He died, shedding His divine blood in agony, the perfect sacrifice for sin? Was Christ on the cross the only way to redeem you, a lost and condemned person?

How many of y’all have ever pulled a shirt out of the dirty clothes? For whatever reason; you were low on options, you thought the shirt was perfect for where you were going but there it was, in the dirty clothes... and you pulled it out? What’s the first thing you do? You give it the sniff test. You smell the item in a specific place to determine whether or not you can put it on your magnificent physique. What was the verdict? “Oh, no! I can’t wear that! Phew!” The best cologne in the world could only mask that odor. Do you know what sin smells like? Do you know what death smells like? Do you know what your own putrid righteousness smells like? Jesus tosses aside Nicodemus’ petty compliments and turns the conversation immediately to where He wants it to go. “You have to be born again.”

“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless one is begotten from above, he is not able to see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Born again, born from above – it is a necessity. Christ’s incarnation, God becoming man – it was necessary for your salvation. Jesus living a perfect life – it was a necessity for someone had to fulfill the law. The Son of God shedding His precious blood – it was a necessity, it had to occur precisely the way it did in order to pay in full the extraordinary debt you have racked up. And every single living human has to be born again, born from above or they will not see the kingdom of God. You’ve been born of your mother – biologically alive with great gifts, but dead spiritually. Original sin is everyone’s predicament. A sinful nature, hostile to God, dead in trespasses and unable to rectify it on our own. Flesh gives birth to flesh. You must be born again. There is no exception.

The world has been turned on its head because of a virus. But does the world care about real death, eternal death? You must be born again. God has arranged it. A new life, Christ's life, erupting in your heart and soul. Born of water and the Spirit, God has arranged for a new creation to invade your being. Jesus unveils this miraculous birth and Nicodemus is skeptical, keeping the whole thing at arm's length. Do you suppose that Jesus backs down? Jesus is the One who genuinely cares about death, real death, crushing and cruel – Jesus knows what death is and He comes to confront it, conquer it. You must be born again. Jesus does not back down but brings Nicodemus into the heart of life. You must be born again, born from above, begotten of water and the Spirit. Baptized! Jesus' death is the source of living water – water that is rosy red with His holy blood. Baptized! You have been born again, born from above, born of divine love and Easter Victory. From eternity, God saw to your new birth. You were washed. In the holy blood of Christ, you were washed. The Holy Spirit invaded your being and you were made new.

A white garment is sometimes put on the newly baptized. Our brides wear white, not so much because they are virginally pure but because they are icons of the church, which Christ has washed with His blood to make her holy. You have been born from above, of the Father's love begotten, born of water and the Spirit – you are alive! In this place, with your eyes opened to the glory of God, you see the Kingdom of God. Your faith sees the risen King in this courtyard, serving the least with His profound grace, forgiving us and blessing us and making us strong to meet the challenges of living in this world. You are vested in the garment of Christ's righteousness. You are holy. Not by virtue of your good works but by virtue of what Christ has done in you. You have been born again, born from above. You know that the life of selfishness and greed and lies and rank indulgence – that old life, that foreign and empty and futile life is left behind. Forgiveness fills our days – forgiveness is Christ's love in action.

Someone I know, someone in my familial circle impregnated a woman who is not his wife. At the very time when his wife was carrying his second child, he committed adultery. Their world was in turmoil. The wife truly, genuinely forgave her husband. He was contrite, broken and she, in love, forgave him. As she put it, how could she not? Given what Christ had done for her, how could she not? It has been some years. He battles depression. He has recently said: "I feel judged by EVERYONE." He is a Christian, this man. Does he feel like he wears his sin like a dirty, stinky shirt every day? What would you say to him? You know exactly what to say to him.

God loved the world in this way – He gave His Son, whom He loved, to us all and the Father steered His only-begotten Son to the cross of Calvary. You know exactly what to say to the man who feels his sin pressing day after day. God loved this beleaguered man by sending the only possible remedy for sin and death. God's grace is for him. God's love is new and fresh and vibrant and empowering and specific and true and enduring and invasive and uplifting and defining and present and in no way measured. Where sin increased grace increased all the more. Not one of us is without sin. Not one of us needs less love than another. Not one of us stands above another. Freely we have received. Freely we give. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but He placed His Son on a cross that we might look to Him and be saved. Christ is our only remedy. Anything (ANYTHING!) that would put itself between us and Him is to be marked and avoided. Anything that makes our forgiveness contingent on our works

is to be renounced. Each of us is in need. Each of us identifies with Christ because He is our only hope.

God loved the world in this way – He placed all sin on His Son and He punished it. On the cross the Holy Son of God reeked of sin and He reeked of death. All of God’s wrath against our iniquity was poured out on a solitary sacrifice. The Holy One became mangled with the refuse of our lives. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He reigns from the tree. Perfect man, He shows us what humanity is to be as He dies in our place. Obedient to the Father, He pours out His life that we might be reborn. Death couldn’t hold Him. Raised on the third day, our King shattered the tomb. God loved the world in this way – He raised His Son and brings us the light of Easter. God loves the world in this way – He gives us new birth through Jesus’ death and resurrection and He feeds us with His Son’s body and blood. We are Christians. We identify with Christ the King.