

THE HOLY TRINITY

May 18, 2008

“Will Just Any God Do?”

A fellow pastor tells the story of how a chance encounter reminded him of a sad spiritual truth. It seems that this pastor was working around the sanctuary one evening when a man, whom the pastor had never met before, came in and walking up to him said, “May I light a candle?” Before the pastor could respond, the man quickly added, “And, by the way, just what kind of church is this anyway?” “Christian,” the pastor replied, “Lutheran Christian to be precise.” And with that the man smiled and said, “Oh, it doesn’t matter, really. I don’t follow any particular religion you see. It’s just that when I pass a church and I’ve got a little time on my hands I like to light a candle and sorta plug into the divine – if you know what I mean. “After all”, he said, “any god will do.”

“Crass as that kind of statement may seem,” the pastor later said, “bland as that brand of religiosity may be and simple as that kind of thinking appears, the sad fact of the matter is that for too many people these days any god really does seem to do.”

It’s true, of course, that we were all created to, if you will, “plug into the divine.” And for many people these days a nodding acquaintance with “just any god” does seem to provide some sort of connection albeit a temporary and shallow one at best. Unfortunately, this kind of superficial religiosity and sporadic quest to plug into the divine – the “light a candle here and offer a prayer there” kind of quest – does, in the end, fall far short of the kind of relationship that the true God not only seeks to have with all people but also offers to all people freely in and through the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Today is Trinity Sunday – a Sunday set aside to celebrate the conviction that, in the end, not “just any god” will do. It’s a day to celebrate the true God and the revelation of Himself in both word and deed as Creator, Redeemer and New Life Giver. It’s a day when we become distinctively doctrinal as we zero in on this revelation of the true God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Will just any god do? Not when it comes to creation. To stop short of acknowledging the first person of the Trinity as Creator and Sustainer of all life and as our Father is nothing short of idolatry. God said it Himself when He said, “Know therefore this day and lay it to your heart that the Lord is God in heaven above and on earth below; there is no other.” The true God, you see, tolerates no substitute, synthetic deity dreamed up by the mind of man – not for His own sake and not for ours. “The Lord is God and there is no other.” Unfortunately, that fact has not always been made or even passed on. A recent survey shows that a majority of high school students could not name, on average, more than three commandments. And invariably those commandments had to do with sex, lying and stealing. Very few cited any commandment from the first table of the Law

including the first which says, “You shall have no other gods before me.” I suspect that what is true of those students is true of our society in general as well.

Will just any god do? Not when it comes to redemption. Christianity is the only faith that speaks of this God of creation intervening in the history of mankind in order to save mankind. It’s the only faith that says that God has come to us in order that He might redeem us for Himself, for the very relationship we were created for but lost through sin. No amount of candle-lighting, prayers or good works can accomplish what God has already accomplished in and through His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. And yet, in another survey taken more than 30 years ago, almost one-half of those who identified themselves as Lutherans seemed to feel that there was something that they had to or could do to save themselves. And if that’s true of Lutherans, how much more is it true of society in general?

Will just any god do? Not when it comes to New Life. For only as the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, is poured out through Word and Sacrament can anyone have the new life that is made available through Jesus Christ by faith and, in that, have that right relationship with Creator God. The work of the Holy Spirit reminds us that we are totally dependent on God for without Him we could never have new life either in this world or in the world to come. Apart from this Spirit who works faith in us through the Gospel, our righteousness is as filthy rags before God but with this Spirit we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ and are able to stand before God now and forever.

Will just any god do? Not when it comes to real living. For while we need to, as one theologian has said, “forget trying to explain the mystery of the Triune God and simply proclaim it and stand in awe,” our Gospel lesson for today reminds us that we also need to live out this mystery day to day by obeying the word and the will of the Triune God in our lives. That word is found in the Bible – Holy Scripture – and that will is not only that we believe and are baptized in His name but also that we live in that name day to day carrying out His Great Commission of making disciples for Christ by baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and by teaching them to observe all that He has commanded us. Only as we seek to carry out this commission do we show that we not only know the True God but also that we believe in Him, that we believe in Him enough to live and die for Him, and, in that, we become vehicles by which this God can have the same relationship with others that He already has with us.

Will just any god do? Hardly! But the true God – the Triune God – God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit – Creator, Redeemer, Counselor – will do ... for eternity. May our worship today reflect both our knowledge of Him as well as our faith in Him and may our lives this week show our commitment to carrying out His word and His will in and through us in our world today. May God bless us all to that end for Jesus’ sake. Amen.