

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

Trinity Sunday: Memorial weekend: May 26, 2024

This Eternal Life

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on this Trinity Sunday. That being said, the Trinity is something that sounds daunting and most of us have probably questioned it at some point. I will be honest, I rather take the Trinity for granted. In today's Gospel reading however, we have Jesus explaining the Father, Son and Holy Spirit through acceptance of faith, repentance and the Holy Spirit. Let's look a little closer as Nicodemus asks questions that we often hold inside ourselves.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a Jewish leader who knew the Mosaic law backwards and forwards and strictly followed it. But he was also a member of the Sanhedrin court, an elite group of Jewish leaders who taught and enforced the Mosaic laws. He was an expert and a rule-enforcing judge, and when someone broke any of those stringent rules or threatened the religious legal system, Nicodemus was one of the few who would get to determine the rule-breaker's punishment.

And, of course, by the third chapter of John, we see that Jesus had already become quite the rule-breaker and was gaining influence among the people. Jesus had been performing miracles and was developing many followers. He had started to challenge the ways of the system, angrily turning over the tables in the Temple and driving out the money-changers who were taking advantage of the poor.

People began to talk. And some were even saying he was the Son of God, the King of Israel, or the Lamb of God who was going to take away the sins of the world. This rabbi named Jesus was unorthodox, and he was beginning to pose quite a threat to the ordained religious system.

And so, as word about Jesus spreads to the Pharisees and some of the members of the Sanhedrin court, they begin to talk, as well. They likely don't speak too kindly of Jesus. And yet, for some

reason, Nicodemus decides to go to this Rabbi: to see him with his own eyes and to hear this rabbi's words with his own ears. Nicodemus is curious. Maybe even hopeful. And so, he sneaks off through the darkness of the night to see Jesus.

After speaking with Jesus, it makes sense that Nicodemus doesn't get it. Nicodemus was born a Jew, a Pharisee, a Jewish leader who had devoted his life to studying the Torah, and a member of the elite Sanhedrin court, who strictly enforced the Mosaic law. If anyone were to see and enter the kingdom of God, it would be Nicodemus. He had all the credentials and was more religiously qualified than anyone else. How could Jesus tell him that his heritage, obedience to the law, and positions of leadership counted for nothing? Then begins the discussion of the Kingdom of God, heaven, and eternal life.

Now, the eternal life Jesus is speaking about is not necessarily what we often think of when we see it on bumper stickers or hear it quoted by street preachers. The Greek word *ainios* – which we translate into “eternal” or “everlasting” – is an adjective which means: “age-like” or having “the quality describing a particular age” or period of time.

According to Strong's "Greek Concordance": this eternal life “operates simultaneously *outside* of time, *inside* of time, and beyond time. It does not focus on the future *per se*, but rather on the *quality* of the *age* it relates to. Thus, believers live in “*eternal* life” right *now*, experiencing this *quality of God's life* now as a *present possession*.”

To put it in other words, eternal life is an age of being in the presence of God. Eternal life is an age and a state of being in which we experience and understand the love and grace of God that is realized in and through God incarnate, God in the flesh, Jesus.

Eternal life is not just about some kind of life after death that we can only reach in a different time and a different realm. God is not in a place that is distant and separate from us. Rather, God is always with us in our current place and time. Thus, eternal life is a new life we are born into from above, hence the Holy Spirit when we are born anew. A life that we may experience in the future, but one that begins in the here and now, as we believe in, put our trust in, and follow

Jesus Christ in his radical and inclusive way of love. Eternal life is a new life we enter into as we are born of the waters and Spirit... a baptismal life that is full of grace. A transformational life that is experienced when we open our eyes, look to the cross, and bring to light our own issues. A life that is experienced when we recognize and begin to let go of our fleshly and worldly desires to put ourselves first, to strive to be on top, and to dominate over others.

This eternal life is experienced when we remember what God has and is doing for us. That God offers us salvation from the evil in the world and calls us to take part in freeing ourselves and all our neighbors from it.

This eternal life is one we can experience because of God's great love for us, not because of anything that we have done. God the Father our creator, incarnated in Jesus as the bridge to our broken relationship with God; Jesus sending the Spirit to continue to mediate that relationship and allow grace and love to thrive – is Jesus' lesson today to Nicodemus, the Trinity.

The eyes of the law-abiding and law-enforcing Nicodemus are finally beginning to open. He is starting to come into the light. The kingdom of God that Jesus is telling him about involves grace, justice, and abundant love, which is extended not just to those in the inner religious circle. For God does not only love the descendants of Abraham and those who are good rule-followers and meticulously obey the Mosaic law. Rather, God so loves the world.

The whole world, no exceptions! Amen