

## Sermon 6-7-2020

### “The Greatest Hope”

**Prayer: “Gracious God bless now the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts. Breathe your Spirit into us and grant that we may hear and in hearing be led in the way you want us to go. Amen.”**



**There once was a successful attorney in Chicago, a father of four daughters, and an active member of the Presbyterian Church. His was a life of peace and contentment --- that is, before a series of calamities assailed him. A fire wiped out his business and his real estate investments. In trying to alleviate the family’s suffering, he arranged for them to take a vacation to Europe. It turned out that he was detained by urgent business, so he sent his family on ahead with promises to catch up to them later.**

**Halfway across the Atlantic the ship carrying his family collided with another ship. Within twelve minutes the ship sank.**



**Miraculously his wife survived, but the four daughters were numbered among the 226 who perished. His wife cabled him from Wales with the words, “Saved alone.”**

**Heartbroken, he took another ship, which would carry him to his grieving wife. He stood upon the deck as his ship passed over the general area on the ocean where the other ship sank along with his daughters. At the moment you would expect him to be overwhelmed with grief, he found himself instead inspired to write the words, which would become a beloved hymn. As he passed near his daughters’ watery grave, Horatio Spafford penned these words: “When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll --- Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, It is**

**well with my soul.” (UMH 377)**

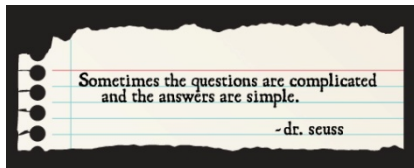


**How could he do that? In the face of such suffering, how could he hold out with such hope? I know, I know, if this was the children's story, I would have a slew of hands up by now. The**



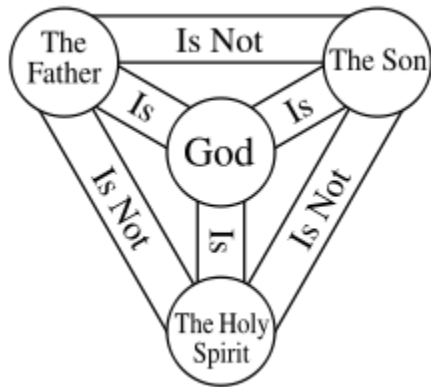
**answer to those questions, of course, is "God."**

**Yet, when you think about it, "God" is a pretty simple answer to a very complex question. Spafford had every right to express his inner being with an agonized "Why me, Lord?" but chose instead to express his inner being with a hopeful, "It is well with my soul."**



**We could ask question after question of why things happen the way they do, and yet any answer would be too simple to be satisfactory. Likewise, we could ask question after question about our God, and yet any answer would fall short of the fullness of God. Complex issues and a complex God; How can we even begin to understand? We have a God who is so complex, that we talk about our God as a Three-in-One God, a Trinity: God the**

## Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.



Today is Trinity Sunday and we preachers are expected to expound one of the most unexplainable mysteries of our faith, in twenty minutes or less. There have been many attempts to try to bring this mystery into our level of understanding. Some have said that the Trinity is like water in its three phases: steam, water, and

ice; three distinct entities yet with one essence.



Others have said that the Trinity is like the same person with three different titles, such as a woman could be a mother, sister, and

daughter all at the same time.



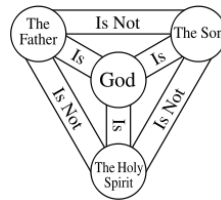
Others have compared the Trinity to ice cream, Neapolitan --- three different flavors in one scoop --- strawberry, chocolate and



vanilla.

Personally, I like the last analogy the best, but that may be because I relate well with ice cream. Maybe that's why I hide behind the pulpit --- to hide my waistline.

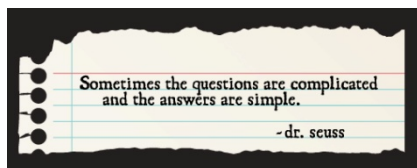
Back to the topic. With all things considered, none of these analogies or metaphors or symbols or whatever it is you want to call



them is a perfect illustration.

The Trinity is three distinct Persons in One God. All three --- Father, Son, Holy Spirit --- have been around for all eternity; all three co-exist so that all can be at the same place at the same time (like at Jesus' baptism) or the presence of One can be emphasized over the other Two (like when Jesus had to leave so that the Holy Spirit could come); each of the Three are able to talk to each other

as distinct Persons (like when God the Son prayed to God the Father).



You get the idea. A complex God, who cannot be easily described. Each of the Three Persons of our One God has different attributes yet the Three work together as One. Working together as One. Working together, being in unity, of one accord is what Jesus talked to his disciples about. We hear about unity through the commandment of Christ that we love one another (John 17:20-26). Then we talked about the unity we have through the power of the Holy Spirit, when we are told to go and spread the good news.

But those are examples of a human unity, an imperfect unity. The Trinity is a divine unity, the one and only perfect unity, of how three distinct Persons work together as One.



This morning's scripture reading from Romans provides one example of the Trinity, how God reveals himself to us and assures us of his love. In this instance, Paul writes about how God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit gives us hope --- the kind of

hope Horatio Spafford experienced when he wrote the words to that hymn. Let's rediscover that hope. We are justified with God the Father by grace. Justified means "made in alignment with." In typing a justified paragraph has straight lines on the right as well as the left margins, no ragged margins. Likewise, when we are justified with God, we are brought into alignment, made right, with God by grace. How? We are justified by God through the Son, Jesus Christ. God the Son acts as intercessor for us with God the Father. It is through Christ's grace that we are able to stand before God the Father as justified. We could not make ourselves right with God. Christ had to do that for us by dying on the cross to remove our sins. It is through God the Son and his sacrifice that we have our hope of sharing the glory of God. That is our future hope.

It is that future hope, the hope of sharing in the glory of God, which also gives us hope for the here and now. That future hope gives us a new perspective: what are the trials I am dealing with now compared to the glory of which I will one day share with my Lord?

It is this attitude, with a focus on the future, which allows Paul to say, "we also boast in our sufferings."

**What a peculiar sequence of events Paul presents to his listeners. Suffering produces endurance. Endurance produces character. And character produces hope.**

**Just an aside here. The KJV translates “endurance” as “patience.” When I was a child someone from the church warned me, “Never pray for patience. God will give you suffering in order to teach you patience.” Has anybody else ever heard that one before? Sounds to me like such people believe in a vindictive God who is willing to give you a stone when you ask for bread, or give you a snake when you ask for a fish (Matt. 7:9-10). We have a Good God who does not glorify in suffering but who helps us work through things.**

**God doesn't create the suffering. God helps us to produce patience (endurance) by helping us to work through the suffering and eventually arriving at hope. A hope that does not disappoint us.**

**Not only a hope that gives us peace with God the Father. Not only a hope that we are given access to through the grace of God the Son. It is a hope that does not disappoint us, because God's love, the love of our Trinitarian God, has been poured out into our hearts through God the Holy Spirit.**

**The Holy Spirit is present with us so that our hearts may be filled with God's love over and over again. Every time an adversity may**



make us feel empty, the Holy Spirit fills us one again with a hope



that does not disappoint.

**The Trinity, the divine Unity, the one and only perfect Unity, provides us with both a future and present hope. A hope for the future: that we will share in the glory of God. And a hope for the present: that God will provide us with what we need to persevere through times of trial: from suffering to endurance, from endurance to character, and from character to hope.**



**Special  
Olympics**

**Some years ago at the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants, all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting line for the 100-yard dash. At the gun they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with the relish to run the race to the finish and win. All, that is, except one boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a couple of times, and began to cry.**

**The other eight heard the boy cry. They slowed down and paused. Then they all turned around and went back. Every one of**

them. One girl with Down's syndrome bent down and kissed him and said, "This will make it better." Then all nine linked arms and walked together to the finish line. Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went on for ten minutes. Another imperfect analogy, but I cannot help but think of God as one who links arm and arm with us --- that is, all three Persons (Father, Son & Holy Spirit) of the One God linking arms with us --- as we "race" toward

the finish line of hope.



Together we will see that future and present hope despite any adversity . . . because God loves to pick us up and help us along the way. AMEN.