

## **Believing the Incomprehensible!**

Holy Trinity Sun. – 05/26/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Deuteronomy 6:4-9 Pastor Keith Besel

vv. 4-5, [Literal translation] **“Listen and take to heart, O Israel: Yahweh our God, Yahweh is uniquely united as One. You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”**

### **Introduction**

- ✘ In that wonderful confession of the Christian faith that we all read responsively a few minutes ago, The Athanasian Creed, there is portion that has historically been translated from the original Latin that proclaims our belief in “the Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible”.
  - ➔ The Latin word for “incomprehensible” is actually “immensus” which is where we get our English word “immense”. The word describes that which is “immeasurable, boundless, infinite”; that is, impossible for us limited human beings to comprehend or grasp.
- ✘ When Jesus was talking with Nicodemus in our Gospel Reading, He spoke about how the Holy Spirit is incomprehensible. He likens it to the way that we believe in the wind.
- ✘ Jesus said, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes” (Jn. 3:8). In other words, you can’t control it nor can you see it (even though you see its effects). Yet, although we can never see or fully grasp the wind, none of us questions its existence, do we?
- ✘ Look at air, oxygen, the atmosphere or the very essence of life itself. Even though we can’t physically see those things, we believe they exist, right?

### **I. The Triune God is “Incomprehensible.”**

- ✘ So it is with the Triune God that we celebrate and confess here today.
  - ➔ The term itself is a mystery – “Tri-une” – meaning “three in one.”
- ✘ So briefly, what is this incomprehensible belief in the Triune God?
  - ➔ First of all, we believe and confess that there is one and only one God. Deuteronomy 4:35 says, “Yahweh is God; besides Him there is no other.”
  - ➔ So, as unpopular as it may be, if you believe God’s Word to be the absolute truth as we do here in this church, then all of the other so-called gods in our world are simply Satan’s lies. They don’t exist. They are merely idols created by mankind; existing in mankind’s imagination.
  - ➔ Paul said in 1 Corinthians 8:4, “We know that an idol has no real existence, and that there is no God but one.”
- ✘ Second, we believe and publicly confess that within the One true God there is “Three Persons” – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So, 1+1+1=1.
  - ➔ I know, that’s incomprehensible; it’s impossible for us to fully grasp. For centuries this doctrine has made people uncomfortable because it doesn’t fit with our human way of thinking.
  - ➔ So naturally we’ve tried to figure it out; we’ve tried to “make sense” out of it. But every time in history that people have tried to make the Trinity “make sense” they’ve fallen headlong into false teaching.
- ✘ That’s why the three Creeds that we Christians confess were created – to respond to the many false attempts in the early Church where human beings tried and tried to make the “incomprehensible” Triune God fit into our limited way of thinking.

- ⊗ And guess what. All of those false teachings still exist today. For example there is:
  - ➔ “Modalism” – which is the belief that God is one person but just in three modes or three expressions, as if God were some kind of eternal “trick-or-treater” that changes His mask and costume depending on what He’s doing at the time. That’s how the Unitarian church today views God – a blatant denial of the Trinity.
  - ➔ Then there is “Tritheism” – which is the belief that there are really three separate gods and that these gods are only three among many other gods.
  - ➔ Which then leads to “Subordinationism” – where people not only believe that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three separate gods, but also that the Son is subordinate; somehow less of a god than the Father and that the Holy Spirit is lesser still under the Son.
  - ➔ Many so-called “churches” take these corruptions of the Bible’s teaching and shamefully mix them up into all kinds of variations of Tritheism and Subordinationism. The most common examples of this are found in the Mormon Church and the Jehovah’s Witnesses today.
- ⊗ You see, the problem comes whenever we are unwilling to trust God’s Word of truth just because it teaches us something that our human minds are unable to comprehend. Rather than trust in God, we too often try to twist and change it to fit inside of our human reason.
  - ➔ But as Christians we can’t do that; not with this or any other teaching from Scripture. Why? because God’s ways are far above our ways.
- ⊗ We are truly blessed as confessional Lutherans because our forefathers understood this danger. So they wrote down and publicly confessed God’s truth regarding the Triune God to help keep us from going astray. In the Apology of the Augsburg confession, written at the time of Martin Luther, we find this quote:
 

“We believe and teach that there is one divine essence, undivided ... and that there are nevertheless three distinct and coeternal persons of the same divine essence, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We have always taught and defended this article, maintaining that its testimonies in the Holy Scriptures are solid, firm, and cannot be overthrown. And we constantly affirm that those who believe otherwise stand outside the church of Christ, are idolaters, and regard God with contempt” (AP, I).
- ⊗ You see, the true Christian church, for ages, has understood the Holy Trinity to be the highest of mysteries (EP, VIII, 18). And we embrace it in faith, because without it we are not saved. And any attempts to force it into our human thinking will always fail.
  - ➔ Once there was a man attending an evening service where the pastor preached about the Triune God. After the service the man approached the pastor and said, “I enjoyed your service, but I am not convinced of what you said. I just cannot get it through my head that there are three Persons and yet only one God.”

So the pastor asked the man, “What size hat do you wear?” The man replied, “6 7/8 – why do you ask?” The pastor replied, “Oh, I was just wondering how you expected to get this great, almighty and majestic God of heaven and earth into just your size 6 7/8 head!”
- ⊗ In reality, that’s what it means to have faith; to believe in and hold fast to that which we cannot comprehend; to accept it as true for no other reason except that God has said it in His Word. Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

## **II. The Incomprehensible Love of God**

- ⊗ But having that conviction; that faith in the Triune God is only the beginning of many more incomprehensible, yet absolutely crucial truths that then follow as a result.

- ⊗ We see perhaps the greatest of these in our Gospel Reading today – it's God's incomprehensible love for you, for me and for the entire world.
- ⊗ Just think about it: How could, and why would the all-powerful, perfect, holy, righteous, God over the entire universe, care one bit about the likes of us?
  - ➔ He said Himself in Scripture that we are all full of sin and disobedience. Throughout history; from the time He gave us life, we have not been satisfied with His gifts. We misuse His name as readily as we breathe air. We publicly fight and rebel against His authority. We abuse His kindness, His creation and all of the good that He gives us.
- ⊗ And still we hear these incomprehensible words, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him" (Jn. 3:16-17).
  - ➔ How awesome is that? That brief Gospel promise refers to each person in the Triune God.
  - ➔ It's the Father who loved and cared for you and me enough to give us His very best! No, not a greeting card, though that is Hallmark's slogan. He gave us – meaning it's 100% an undeserved gift - He GAVE His own Son to be brutally tortured and sacrificed for our salvation.
  - ➔ And it's the Son, Himself who also loves you and me enough – SO MUCH that He willingly took our human nature upon Himself. Now that's love! And there's more: He could have vaporized all of those who were out to kill Him with just one word – His power is that "immense", but He didn't. Instead He took our sin upon Himself and endured the penalty of hell and death, though He never sinned even once. Why? So that you and I might be saved.
  - ➔ Which brings us to the Spirit whom we received from the Father and Son. He loves us enough to break through, break down and overcome the barriers of our unbelief and doubt to deliver to us the benefits of Jesus' sacrifice. He is the One that gives us the ability to believe in Jesus. In our baptismal grace He showers us with forgiveness and promises us eternal life in heaven.
- ⊗ Paul tells us in Romans 8:15 that it's through the Spirit that we become God's children; that we come to see God's incomprehensible love and cry out "Abba, Father."

### III. The result of God's Love

- ⊗ So, now as His children you and I have the incomprehensible within us. It changes us from selfish rebels into people who actually want to live according to the words of Deuteronomy 6.
  - ➔ It's true, as believers, we are so thankful for God's incomprehensible love and grace that we want to "love Yahweh [our] God with all of [our] heart and with all of [our] soul and with all [of our] might" (v.5).
- ⊗ His love for us; His gift of grace transforms who I am and how I think so that now my focus and priority is to spend time with my children and grandchildren impressing upon them God's commands and promises in Scripture.
  - ➔ This is the role God has given to us parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and Christian adults.
- ⊗ I can't tell you how many times I've heard parents tell me, "We are not going to teach just one religion to our children. Instead we want them to learn about all of the religions so that they can decide for themselves what to believe when they get older."

- Well, that false, flawed and sinful human thinking is 100% against the Word that we have directly from God here in Deuteronomy, chapter six. To teach that all religions; that all gods are equal is to actively teach our children to reject the one true, Triune God.
- For God stresses in Ephesians 6:4 that a parent's – and especially a father's second highest priority in life (behind his own love for God) must be to teach God's Word to his children.
- ⊗ Look at our text from Deuteronomy six: It is a full-time, life-time, all-encompassing job to teach-and-talk God's word wherever we are at in order to "bring [our children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). It's a major commitment – "walking" and "talking", reading, praying, and living the faith with our children.
  - And God is very clear. It's not just any faith about any random god that we are to teach. Verse four, "Take to heart and listen", He says, "Yahweh our God, Yahweh is uniquely united as one." First all, He's clear: our God has a name: Yahweh. And second, the Hebrew word "echad" (אֶחָד) means "unique; one of a kind" and "perfectly united in essence".
  - There is only one true faith in the only one true God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This we are to actively teach to our children and proclaim to the world.

## Conclusion

- ⊗ But, let's be honest with ourselves. We haven't done all of that as we should, have we? We've allowed other things to get in the way. We've been selfish and weak in our priorities. We've even allowed our children, our society and others to make decisions about the Spiritual upbringing and activities of our children, instead of God.
  - Yet through it all God's love for us remains incomprehensible; always faithful; never wavering.
- ⊗ He's like the Energizer Bunny on steroids times a million. He just keeps giving, giving, giving and giving some more.
  - Giving us forgiveness for our sins.
  - Giving us the desire and strength to amend our ways.
  - Giving us encouragement, comfort and even accountability through our fellow believers.
  - Giving us His incomprehensible peace in any and all circumstances.
  - Giving us the promise of eternity in Paradise with Him.
  - Giving us His incomprehensible love!
- ⊗ And giving it all in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.