

Whenever a curious person asks me why I'm a Christian, why I believe so fully in the Christian faith, I always answer with the Holy Trinity. Truly, what makes the Christian faith so unique and whole and special for me is the Holy Three-in-One - God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. It's the completeness, the wholeness of God our creator and sustainer, Jesus the Word made flesh, God's love made human, and the Holy Spirit who connects us in holy mystery to all our sisters, brothers, and siblings across time and space, and works in ways that make our lives beautiful and fulfilling. The way we are met by God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit even in our brokenness and filled with love and direction instead of shame or fear is nothing less than life-saving. There's a unique sense of unity and wholeness that just fits with the entirety of what it is to be human and part of this created world in which we live.

I could continue to answer this question for a very long time, which, admittedly, is probably a good thing given my place in this pulpit and role as a pastor, but today is a day of celebrating this Holy Trinity, the Holy Three-in-One, and keeping our focus there.

Often times when others are asked about the Christian faith and what is at the core, the why for being a Christian, they will answer with what is arguably the most famous verse in the Bible, as we heard in our readings today. God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.

It's such a gift to be able to connect these two core tenets of Christian faith, the why behind our believing, because we cannot truly understand this most famous verse of scripture, John 3:16, without also understanding the Holy Trinity. We celebrate the Holy Trinity today, on this Holy Trinity Sunday, and I invite you, dear friends, to explore how each part of the Trinity may encourage and grow your faith.

I invite you to be curious with me today. For how often we cite this super-familiar and super-famous verse (and rightfully so, it's gorgeous and powerful), let's lean into what could be new to us in this Living Word, these ancient words.

How can you see familiar parts of faith in new ways through considering God more closely? Or Jesus? Or the Holy Spirit?

How can we learn more about how God actually works, who Jesus really is, how we are connected in Spirit from these holy words?

Let's take a minute and hear this verse again - For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have eternal life.

God is up first in this verse, and the main thing we learn about God here (and probably most of scripture) is that God loves the world. God loves the world so deeply that not even the threat of death, the death of his only Son would stop God from loving the world. Even in the good, the bad, the horrible, the unfathomable, the absolutely heart-ending incredulity of giving his only son, God loves the world. And God doesn't love us because of the heart-wrenching brokenness that exists in the world, no, God loves us because we are human. Humans are not perfect, but humans have worth, and beauty, and the power of belief that changes everything and brings people back to life from the very depths of pain and brokenness in our world. Love still triumphs over death, thanks be to God, the very creator and giver of love itself.

Jesus is the Son, of course, that God gave up for the sake of humanity - for the sake of everyone. It must have been a bit odd, Jesus speaking these words about himself, that he knew from early on in his ministry (this verse being said in chapter 3 of 21 in the Gospel of John, which does follow some sense of chronology) that he was going to die at some point for the sake of humanity, out of God's great love for them. But that death wasn't just for the sake of his dying, Jesus' death was for the sake of us all to have life eternal, life beyond just the simple transactional nature that we often experience with gifts. This is a gift from God himself, the creator of us all, and that gift is life itself. Life in the human experience that is deeply understood by Jesus because he was uniquely human himself. The humanity of Jesus inspires us, gives us hope, gives us something to hold

onto in the midst of being overwhelmed, to be able to see that life truly is eternal and everlasting.

Which then gets us curious again - what does eternal life even mean? It's something so crucial to our faith, and yet can mean different things at different times for different people. Often the idea of eternal life is connected to heaven, the place we go when we have died, connected by the Holy Spirit with the communion of saints, the blessed connection of people who are living now and who have lived before us. The reality of the people we love never truly leaving us seems very connected to eternal life for me. The stories, memories, photos, love, feelings, joy, presence that we cherish from people we love who have died continue their lives here on earth, within us and our very beings, our spirits, our souls.

Eternal life, or sometimes translated as everlasting life, cannot be separated from our understanding of the Holy Spirit in our faith. As I mentioned, the Holy Spirit connects us all in the communion of saints, the community of beloved people around the world now, and also those beloved people who have died and passed on to the heavenly kingdom.

But life everlasting, this means something significant for the life we know and have here on earth too. What does life everlasting for us human, fleshy, embodied people really mean?

It's the power of being delighted and surprised. It's the power of breath centering, accompanying, empowering you, every step of your journey. The force of life that helps you know you're alive, you're human, the ability to breathe and feel sensations in your body. Life everlasting is about being alive in the here and now. And we cannot be separated from the Holy Spirit in that radical, beautiful aliveness. Sometimes we look down on what it is to be alive in the slightly less dignified parts of being human, bodily functions and anxious social faux pas and sadness and pain, to name a few. But even just the act of waking up every morning, knowing that there is breath within you and winds of creation around you to sustain your very aliveness - that is a life that is part of eternity. That is the miracle promised to us in

baptism by God, and even when the day comes that we aren't going to rise in our human bodies like this anymore, we are united with Christ in a death like his, just as we are united in a resurrection like his - as the famous Romans verse assures us. Just as Jesus Christ was human, walked and wept and taught and prayed, we too are united with him in our humanity, by the power of the communion of saints, for the life everlasting.

So friends, I invite you to continue to be curious about and be fed by the core parts of your faith - God's presence and power in your life, the truth of who Jesus is, how we can be embraced in our humanness by the one who loves us deeper than we can ever know. Continue to be open to the Holy Trinity, the Three-in-One of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit that creates and sustains life within and around you. How can you let God in enough to surprise you in your life of faith? I pray that the power of the Trinity, the loving and powerful core of our faith, gives you a sense of life, of beautiful aliveness and renewal this week and beyond. And I pray that the neverending love of God, greater than even death, made possible through Jesus Christ, will fill you and guide you, just as you are, now and always. Amen.