

The Church of the Good Shepherd
Lexington, Kentucky
Sermon for Trinity Sunday ~ June 19, 2011
The Reverend Ronald D. Pogue

Today, Trinity Sunday, is an unusual feast day in the Church's calendar. Most major feasts commemorate events in the life of Jesus. Trinity Sunday has to do with a doctrine – the doctrine that says the One God has revealed himself as a Trinity of Persons. While this teaching has always been difficult, it nevertheless continues to provide a foundation for bearers of the Gospel message throughout the world.

Given that fact, we have to ask, how were the Apostles and the early Christians able to carry out the great commission of Jesus Christ in their generation when, by all calculations, the odds were stacked against them? And, how are we supposed to follow in their footsteps in our own generation, plagued as we are by an even more complex and often discouraging set of statistical odds? I think St. Paul has given us about as good an answer as we'll ever find to both of those questions in today's passage from II Corinthians (13:5-14).

Bearers of the Gospel examine themselves. *Put yourselves to the test and judge yourselves to find out whether you are living in faith.* Accepting the Christian faith is not a substitute for living by it. Paul suggests that we continually examine ourselves in the light of Christ so that as we know the truth about him we will know the truth about ourselves and turn more and more of ourselves over to him. I'm not thinking primarily of moralistic issues as much as I am thinking of the way we say we have faith in Christ but live as if we had to create the world and save ourselves. I'm thinking of how we approach the mission Christ has given to us more concerned about what we don't have than what we do have. I'm thinking of the degree to which we risk our lives in the service of the One who gave his life so that we might live.

A pupil in a missionary school once asked the missionary if he really believed that God is our Father and that he cares for each one of us. On being assured that the missionary did believe these things, the child asked, "Then why do you worry so much?"

You see, our real beliefs are what we live by, individually and corporately. Theoretical belief can exist alongside practical atheism: that is, confessing faith in God, but living as if God doesn't really matter in the decisions we make and the strategies we adopt. If we want to be bearers of the Gospel, we have to examine ourselves so that Christ can come in to heal, transform, and employ every part of our lives in the divine cosmic mission of redeeming the world.

St. Paul also says we need to strive for perfection. *Pray that you will be made perfect.* Perfection, as Paul uses it, is not in the Latin sense of being completed without error, but, rather, in the Greek sense of intentionality and maturity. We are to be intentional in our pursuit of maturity in our faith and our love as the main goal of life.

What better goal for a life than to let God work his wonders with us and lead us to maturity in our relationship with him and those around us? Oh, maturity is not always strength. In fact, this kind of maturity has a sort of weakness and vulnerability built into it. You see it best displayed in the Christ hanging upon the cross. We are to die with Christ so that we may live with him. What is sown in

weakness is raised in power. Striving for perfection is setting the goal of maturity in our relationship with God and actively pursuing it. It is the obvious outgrowth of our baptism. Making disciples and becoming disciples is the all-encompassing focus for the missionary Church in every age. A disciple is a person who sits at the feet of the teacher, following him, learning from him. The pursuit of perfection in our discipleship is the life-long effort to express gratitude to the One whose love and grace is lavished upon us in the Sacrament of Baptism.

Bearers of the Gospel require unity. *Agree with one another.* Says St. Paul. By this he means “help one another.” He does not mean that everybody is in unanimous agreement on every subject. Agreement in the Spirit is a much deeper and richer matter than agreement in dogma.

St. Paul’s words are a warning against divisive tendencies in the community of Christ’s disciples. Only a united Church has a vital message for a disunited world. It must present to the world the divine pattern of a free community in which individual liberty and integrated fellowship are both present. The community represented in the profoundly integrated personality of The Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, informs the unity we seek as Christians. And, the more united we are, the better we work together, the more channels we open for the Spirit to work through us. Bearing the Gospel is something we are called to do *together* – because no one of us has all the gifts and all the message.

Finally, we are to let harmony and peace prevail. *Live in peace, greet one another with a holy kiss.* No congregation can worship the God of Peace in the spirit of bitterness. Love for one another is a necessary expression of our love for God. We act out that belief in the exchange of the Peace every time we celebrate the Holy Meal. That offering of signs of peace, the holy kiss as it was called in the early Church, is a liturgical action which gives demonstration of the fellowship that unites all Christians as members of God’s people in Christ. This tradition has been preserved here in order to help us be bearers of the Gospel to one another and to others outside the bounds of this fellowship who need its liberating, transforming power.

It is the Spirit of God who gives direction to our efforts toward unity, harmony, and peace. Obedience to his guidance is the only condition of his blessing. Without that obedience, the blessing is perfunctory. We receive what the Spirit offers in the degree in which we are willing to do what he asks of us.

The statistical data has always been stacked against the mission of the Church. Our age is no exception. In the face of what appears to be certain failure, Jesus’ continues to speak to us his Great Commission: to Go, to make disciples, to baptize, and to teach obedience. That is a tall order in every generation. But with the guidance of St. Paul to inform our life as a community of Gospel bearers and the promise of Christ to be with us always to instruct and empower us, we will be more than conquerors.