

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we also have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice confidently on the basis of our hope for the glory of God.

³Not only this, but we also rejoice confidently in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, ⁴and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope. ⁵And hope will not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us.

Paul tells us this morning that since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God. But could this ever happen if God was not who he says he is? It's Trinity Sunday, the Sunday we confess our faith with the Athanasian Creed. This creed is long and repetitive. "God is this. He is not that." It may sound boring and needless. Do we really have to dive so deep? Can't we just simplify it? God is God and we believe in God?

But there is a reason that the creeds were written. Men painstakingly scoured the scriptures to understand who God is. Because "God is God" is not good enough. It leads to a universalism where people say, "It doesn't matter how you worship. We all worship the same God." But I want you to think about it this way for a minute: Everybody at church knows Carol. They know what she looks like. They know how she sounds. But the thing is, our church has five members named Carol. Wouldn't it be foolish for us to say, "Ultimately, we all know the same Carol?" While they may share a name, they have different personalities and attributes. They look and sound different than each other. To merge all Carols into the same person would be to do a disservice to everything about each of the Carols. Whoever claims all the gods people worship are the same God only see God for his name or his general position above us, but deny all the other attributes about God. They want to simplify God and strip him of what makes him God, all to create a sense of unity where it doesn't actually exist. And that's even worse than saying all Carols are the same Carol. There is one God, and who he is matters to our eternal well-being, and subsequently, our peace right here and now.

But why does it matter that God is triune? I mean, we can't even fully understand the Trintiy. Every time we try to compare him to something of this world, like a three-leaf clover or a 3-tool Swiss Army knife, we inaccurately describe the relationship within the Trinity and step right into heresy. And yet, it does matter that God is who he says he is.

God is our Father, the one who created us and everything out of nothing and planned salvation for his fallen creation. It was in that perfect plan that he sacrificed his Son for the sins of the world. And through his Son, he adopts us into his family. If God is not Father, we remain

spiritually fatherless in this world of sin, disconnected from our creator and bound to exist as any creation that does not know the purpose it was made for.

God is also Son. We see this clearly as Jesus is born as God in human flesh, 100% God and 100% man. This qualifies him to be our substitute, living perfectly under the law of God and dying for our sins on the cross. His resurrection is proof that we have been justified with God, declared not guilty. If the Son is not God, we have not been set free from sin, we do not have a champion who intercedes with the Father for us, and we have no confidence that our lives will continue into eternity.

Finally, God is Spirit. As we say in the Nicene Creed, “I believe in the Holy Spirit...who proceeds from the Father and the Son.” This is the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, who goes out from Father and Son to instill faith in desperate hearts. He does so through the gospel of Christ, packaged for us in word and sacrament. And then, having been justified by faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit continues to work sanctification in our hearts, setting us apart to live out God’s will in thankfulness. But if the Spirit is not God, faith becomes something we must do, a choice that we must make. And I’ll tell you what: as I stand in the aisle of the grocery store to pick up something my wife forgot, looking over the dozens of choices of brands and flavors in front of me, I can never be sure that I’m making the right choice. In the same vein, can I ever be certain of faith if I wasn’t sure God the Holy Spirit worked that faith within me?

And yet, there is one God who saves, not three. The three persons of the Trinity do not work independent of each other, because the true God has perfect unity within himself. Denying the Trinity is denying the very God who saves. If God is not triune, then there is no Father to send the Son, no Son to redeem us, and no Spirit to bring us to faith. We trust in one God in three persons because only the triune God gives life, forgiveness, and salvation.

And that’s where the peace that Paul talks about today comes in. No other god can save like the triune God can and does. And, yes, that’s because no other god exists. But it’s also because the god made by humans cannot be what we need, even in their wildest imaginations. All other religions besides Christianity promise life and salvation to those who meet a certain requirement. You want heaven, dear Muslim? Follow Allah’s commands to a “t.” You want peace, my Buddhist friend? Detach yourself from cravings of life and you won’t suffer any longer? You want a right relationship with the divine, Jewish neighbor? Keep the commandments. Follow the law of God. It’s always us earning it. It’s always human beings who have to find their way into a right relationship with their god.

But what does the true God tell us? How does he speak in his word? He does not tell us to look inward. He tells us to look at his Son. He does not leave us out in the cold, always wondering where we stand with God. He invites us into his presence to declare us forgiven and holy again and again. You see, those persnickety debates the old men had nearly two millennia ago about

who God is do matter. Because who God is means the difference between having to earn our way to glory or having it given to us as a gift.

And because faith has been given to us as a gift, because we are justified by faith in Jesus, we have peace with God. And that peace is not just a feeling. It is an existence. While your emotions might go back and forth at times, sometimes feeling worried and sometimes feeling clam, your status before God is unchanged. You are his and he is yours. And that means you have access to God's grace. You are free to come to the throne of God with anything and everything. And that unfettered access to the triune God – the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier – lets you live a life of tranquil peace. But that peace is just a foretaste of what waits for us after this life of blessings from God. We look forward to the glorious and sure hope of heaven.

But that pathway to heaven is a road full of potholes. Let's not pretend that the moment we were baptized into Christ all the stresses of this world disappeared. We have to deal with sufferings. Every day. Maybe every hour of every day. Life is hard, and almost every aspect of life – even the ones we enjoy the most – is filled with difficulty.

What is the purpose of suffering? I think that's a question people spend a lot of time wrestling with. And let's not pretend that we never ask God "why" when our lives become dreary. It is not easy to see the benefit of chronic illness and pain. We struggle to find any good in mass destruction and death. And because life is filled with so much letdown and struggle, it would be easy to fall into the pattern of thinking that life is not worth living.

If God is not triune, then suffering has no purpose. It is something that should be avoided at all costs. Will kids make your life more difficult? Of course! Then don't have them. Will caring for a loved one take away you time? Maybe. Ditch them! Make them someone else's problem. Quit your job when it gets hard. Stop paying your bills when the budget gets tight. Live life for you and forget all those people who heap suffering on you through added responsibility. Of course, these are some overinflated examples, but I have heard the case seriously made for each one of them. If God is not triune, then there is no peace in your life, and there is no good reason for you to endure suffering.

But in showing us himself, God reveals to us the purposes of suffering. Because God is who he is, and because who he is exactly the God we need to overcome our sins, our status with God is certain and we have a new view of suffering. No longer is suffering the judgement of God cast upon those he hates. Because we know he loves us in Christ, we also know that he allows suffering for our benefit. We see one such benefit here: "...because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope. And hope will not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us." The crosses that we are given to carry are not meant to beat us down, but to build us up in him. They are meant to remind us that our strength is not found

in ourselves. We cannot heal ourselves or fix our sadness, and we certainly cannot bring ourselves eternal peace. But the triune God can, and the triune God does. This is where our strength is found, and this is why suffering gives us hope, not the flimsy hope where we wish that the lottery ticket will hit, but the certain hope of life eternal here and in heaven, all because our God is who we need him to be. Creator. Redeemer. Sanctifier. Amen.