

## **“The Gifts of God are One”**

**John 16:12-15**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, graduations, and the like, are wonderful times of celebration that always come with everyone’s favorite part—gifts! Quite often, these gifts are a collaborative effort from many people, who come together and pool their resources to provide an exceptional gift that none could provide on their own. Each person signs a card so that the one receiving this splendid generosity knows who contributed and played a part in providing the means for such a gift. And then we get the opportunity to thank each person for their great kindness and love for us. The gift of these people, however, does not compare to the great gift of salvation from our Lord and Savior. What a blessing it is to gather together on this Holy Trinity Sunday, to extol the name of our Lord and God, to worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in unity, as we have just confessed. In the truth of that confession, we find also that each person of the Trinity does not contribute part and parcel to our great gift of salvation, but the gifts of God are one, just as He is three in one and one in three.

The earthly gifts we receive on those special days I mentioned serve the happiness of our sinful flesh when we don’t acknowledge the source of those good things. The things we get fuel the Old Adam as he constantly desires more and more. He will never be satiated by what you already have or what you receive in the generosity of others. And so he constantly is egging you on to desire more, and seek the things of this life as your goals. It’s like that country song that says money can’t buy happiness, but it can buy me a boat, a truck to pull it, and a Yeti cooler full of beer.

Just look at the prominent preachers of the so-called “church” today. These charlatans preach a gospel of prosperity through health and wealth, teaching people that God desires them to be rich and famous. All you have to do is give more money to the ministry of these heretical false prophets who are actively leading the people of God astray. The more they have the more they can give you, and thus “prove” that you have God’s favor because they and you are getting rich and have more than someone who is only worshiping according to the command of Holy Scripture. They aren’t preaching the full counsel of God in Law and Gospel, but they are being fueled by the evil one and the desires of their Old Adam to want more. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is entirely lost on these men and women, and is therefore lost on those whom they are walking down the path of destruction.

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Using the proper understanding of the Trinitarian nature of God, we can easily refute these wayward false teachers. First of all, they teach that you, a poor, miserable sinner, must be the author of your success, the creator of your relationship with God which is only based upon what you get. Well, the truth of God the Father as the creator of all things denounces that idea from the jump. He alone “works all things according to the counsel of His will,” as Paul says in Ephesians 1:11. The Father’s work of creation is about more than just the work of the 6 days of creation. Paul preaches this at the Acropolis in Acts 17 when he says, “In Him we live and move and have our being.” Only He creates the good things in our lives, and He does so out of His divine goodness, love, and mercy.

Secondly, they lead you to believe that your redemption is in your own hands. Sure, Jesus died on the cross for you, but if you don’t make yourself available to Him, you’ll never be forgiven or saved. What a horrific way to live a life of faith. In that reality there is no faith, there is only me and my works, and if that is the case then there is no hope. The redemptive work of Jesus Christ is His alone, and not ours. God the Son did not die on the cross to give you some “infused grace” that gives you the ability to receive His gracious mercy. That idea on its own is entirely contrary to what gracious mercy is. It is a gift of undeserved kindness. The abounding and steadfast love of our God was shown to us and appropriated to us by the death of Jesus Christ. It is in that Gospel truth that we put our hope and in that Gospel truth that we abide. We are forgiven and saved by His grace not because we have done enough to earn it, or because of how much money we give to others, but because “God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

Thirdly, these false teachers base their entire “theology” upon their own understanding and not on the solid foundation of the Word. The revelation of the Holy Spirit through the prophets, Apostles, and evangelists is the only source of knowledge we need as those who believe in the one Triune God. By His revelation of the Word, we can obliterate the stance of these preachers that they know best what we need to do to gain our faith. Proverbs 3:5, for instance, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.” If left to our own understanding, we would always find ourselves going down a dangerous path. Our reason is a gift of the Spirit, who uses it to guide us back to His Word for the answers that it seeks. We don’t need to “make sense” out of what He has revealed to us, and we certainly don’t need to buy the interpretation from some yahoo on a stage. All has been revealed and made known to us,

just as Jesus opened the minds of His Apostles to the truth of the Scriptures on the night of His resurrection.

And in our text this morning, the Lord Jesus tells His Apostles about the Spirit who will come, “He will glorify Me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that He will take what is mine and declare it to you.” What the Father has the Son owns and the Spirit declares. So much is wrapped up in those words of Jesus. The truth of what He brings to us by the Spirit is so much more than just words of comfort, but the truth of our salvation when we go to the Father just as He has. Everything that we are given and receive by faith is a treasured gift from the entirety of the Holy Trinity. Luther says it best in the Large Catechism’s conclusion on the Creed, where the Reformer writes:

But here you have everything in richest measure. In these three articles, God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of His Fatherly heart, His sheer, unutterable love. He created us for this very purpose, to redeem and sanctify us. Moreover, having bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, He has given us His Son and His Holy Spirit, through whom He brings us to Himself. As we explained before, we could never come to recognize the Father’s favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father’s heart. Apart from Him we see nothing but an angry and terrible Judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Everything that we have is a gracious gift from our loving God. That truth is why we confess the creed that we did today, even though it is long and tedious. Every word of our confession is an acknowledgement that without the Triune God and His mercy, we would be lost to the world and condemned to death. We cannot do any good of our own volition, and our free will only leads us down a path of rejection of the Holy Trinity. And so we turn in humble contrition to the truth that the Father shows us His love by giving up His only Son into death for our sakes and they send us the Holy Spirit to keep us in the faith of Him who died for our salvation.

The only “earthly” gifts we need are present right here in the divine service for our benefit. In the means of bread and wine, Jesus body and blood is truly present here among us. He who bought us back from the sentence of eternal death is here to bring the promised forgiveness that He won for us at the cross. The Holy Spirit brings faith in the means of water and Word when the Father claims us as His own dear children in the baptismal washing which cleans us of the filth of our original sin. By the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the one who has all that is the Father’s and sends those same

gifts to us by the Spirit, we know the truth of our salvation, and the gift of forgiveness is ours in the proclamation of His holy absolution. All of this we receive only by faith, and not by our works. We will never be worthy to receive these things, but God gives them to us anyway out of His divine love and mercy.

Only by the grace of the Triune God do we have the gift of faith, and by that faith, the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. What belongs to Jesus from the Father is brought to us by the Holy Spirit. And so, what belongs to Jesus also belongs to us. His eternal inheritance is ours by faith in the one true God, according to the grace and mercy He has given to us. No one can gain an inheritance. It must be given by the one who owns it. As the unity in Trinity and Trinity in unity, our loving God has declared to us that we are His adopted sons and are worthy of receiving the same gift He gives to His only begotten Son. As St. Paul says in Ephesians 1:5-6, “In love He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved.” He has claimed us as His eternal companions, to live in the presence of His unified essence for all eternity. As we await the realization of our inheritance, we understand in the now that the greatest gift of God is one—eternal life with Him in His house forever, and it is given by the One Triune God. And that truth sustains us in this life, as we look with longing eyes raised to heaven, where the eternal Father, Son, and Holy Spirit will welcome us into His kingdom of eternal light to dwell in His love. Amen.