

Nicene Creed Sermon Series: *Sermon #5*: August 17, 2018

*Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be ever pleasing to you, O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer – amen*

Well saints, I do not like to be the bearer of bad news, but this will be the last week of our sermon series on the Nicene Creed. I would say that at least you will be spared from long sermons, but Fr. Ward is back and will be preaching again ... I'll let you draw your own conclusions about what that means for sermon length. Though to be fair, my sermon last week at the ten o'clock service was long even by Fr. Ward's standards. So as it turns out, saints, you are just stuck with long sermons. I'll try to make it up to with this sermon. Perhaps, don't hold your breath though ... One way that I will shorten this sermon is by simply directing you to the sermon rack to get caught up on my first three sermons in written form, or the website for the audio.

We do need, however, to revisit the sermon from last week, as I will be building on it for this week's sermon. As you will hopefully recall, last week we looked at why the Christian faith as it is expressed, codified, and taught in the Nicene Creed needs to be Trinitarian in order to be faithful to the faith handed down to us by the Old Testament. We saw that the revelation of God's self (what we called his *economy*) in Old Testament passages such as Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Isaiah 45:21-24 in conjunction with his self revelation in Jesus Christ – a revelation that we saw included Jesus' claims about himself, and most especially his resurrection – forced St. Paul and the early church to make theological judgments about who Jesus is in his Being and relation to YHWH. In other words, the life, death, and resurrection of the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, exert a pressure on the monotheistic faith of the Shema inherited by St. Paul and the early church. To worship Jesus as these events warrant was to risk to idolatry; that is, unless one was somehow able to make sense of the pressure. And indeed, we looked at 1 Corinthians 8:6 to see St. Paul include Jesus in the Shema found in Deuteronomy 6:4 and then we looked at Philippians 2:5-11 to see St. Paul include Jesus in the claims about and the worship of YHWH in Isaiah 45:21-24.

In the two New Testament passages, we saw St. Paul make several interpretive moves in order to explain to his readers that this Jesus is, in fact, one in Being and relation to the selfsame God revealed in Old Testament. In 1 Corinthians 8, St. Paul takes up all the Greek words of the Shema and rearranges them to include Jesus in the divine identity. He tells us that there is one God, the Father, and one Lord, Jesus Christ. Recall that the significance here is the statement that there is one *Lord, Jesus Christ*, which is to include Jesus in the divine legal name YHWH for which the Greek word "Lord" is a substitute. To put it another way, St. Paul is saying that there is one YHWH, the Father, and one YHWH, Jesus Christ. To further his point that Jesus is one in Being with YHWH, St. Paul includes Jesus in the divine activity of creating with God the Father. In this way, that is by demonstrating that Jesus is one in Being and Action with God the Father – Father already being a common relational conceptuality for YHWH – St. Paul defends worshipping Jesus as a righteous fulfillment of the command in Deuteronomy 6:5 to "Love YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." In fact, according to St. Paul's logic, we might read the same command as: "Love Jesus your God" or perhaps more accurately: "Love Jesus with the Father, your God..." I would be remiss if I did not point out that even as St. Paul is working diligently to demonstrate that God the Father and Jesus exist as one Being, YHWH, he also works hard to respect their personages and does not collapse the Father into Jesus or vice-versa. In other words, for St. Paul, even as they exist as one Being, they exist as distinctly identifiable persons. We saw this same logic at play in St. Paul's reading of Isaiah 45:21-24 in Philippians 2:6-11.

Now this is a good start to showing the necessary Trinitarian shape of the Christian faith which is expressed, codified, and taught in the Nicene Creed; but if we left it here, we would have what is referred to as *binitarianism* – the idea that God exists as two persons, not three – as we have not yet addressed the Holy Spirit and his inclusion in the Triune Godhead. And indeed, there are scholars who argue that St. Paul and the other New Testament writers had not yet figured out that the Holy Spirit was a divine person. Instead, according to these scholars, the New Testament writers understood him to be a mode or a power of God, but not a person, at least not as of their writing. However, there is a growing number of bible scholars, including one of our professors at Trinity, Wesley Hill, who argue that St. Paul and the other authors of the New Testament did in fact understand the Holy Spirit to be of one Being with the Father and the Son. Their argument, which I think is right, is based on the same logic that we saw above regarding Jesus.

I want us, then, to look at two examples from St. Paul on the Holy Spirit so we can complete the circle and tie a bow on this series. First, let's look at a more obvious example: Galatians 4:4-6, which you can find in your pew bibles on page 1167 [read]. Okay, first, this will not be clear in the English, but in the book of Galatians the word *God*, insofar as it is translated from the Greek word *theos*, always refers to God the Father, which, as we noted earlier, was already a relational name for YHWH, hence the scandal of Jesus' claim that: "I and the Father are One." So then, here in verse 4 where it says, "God sent forth his Son," it is God the Father sending forth his Son, whom we know to be Jesus. This is significant 1) because St. Paul is placing them together in a mutually necessary relationship – a Father is not a Father without a Son (or daughter), and a Son is not a son without a Father – and 2) understood in light of the previous statement that it was in "the fullness of time," St. Paul is claiming that this relationship is eternal. The Son was the Son of the Father *before* he was sent and they were in this relation of Being outside of time such that they could wait until the right time. Notice also that in verse 5 St Paul tells us that the purpose of the sending of *the Son* is so that we might be united to the Father also as adopted sons. Our sonship is real and legally binding, but it is not of the same order as the natural Son's. Nevertheless, God the Father has also sent the Holy Spirit in order to bridge that gap by dwelling in our hearts and making our sonship closer to the Son's by the indwelling of the divine.

But I just got ahead of myself. So look at verse 6 [read]. Notice, "God [who is the Father, same as above] has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts." First, St. Paul testifies to the interrelationship of the Father to the Holy Spirit *through* the Son, this is, in turn, made all the more explicit as it is the *Holy Spirit* that cries out "Abba, Father" even as he indwells our hearts. This means that St. Paul understands the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit to be in a mutually constitutive relationship in which the revelation of One (in this case the Father) is at once and the same time a revelation of all three. Second, in the Greek the verb that is translated here as "sent forth" is the same verb that St. Paul uses to describe the sending of the Son from eternity in verse 4. Meaning, that the Holy Spirit sent in the same manner as the Son, suggesting the same sort of eternally mutual relationship between the Holy Spirit and the Father as between the Father and the Son. It also means that he is sent forth for the same ultimate purpose, the affecting of our adoption as sons (or daughters). Thinking back to our discussion a moment ago about 1 Corinthians 8 wherein St. Paul includes Jesus in the divine activity and relationship and Being with the Father, we see the same logic at work here with the Holy Spirit. St. Paul includes him in the eternal relationship of the Father and the Son as well as the divine activity of our adoption as sons – that is to say in our salvation, which according to Isaiah 45 only YHWH can accomplish.

Now, let's look at one more example from St. Paul, 2 Corinthians 3:12-17, which you can find in your pew bible on pages 1156-1157 [read]. The context of the statement about the Holy Spirit here is a reference to Exodus 34:34-35: "But whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would take off the veil until he came out; and whenever he came out and spoke to the sons of Israel what he had been commanded, the sons of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone. So Moses would replace the veil over his face until he went in to speak with him." Now there is so much that could be said about these two passages, but I shall stick to my point, and that is that in offering an interpretation of these events to the Corinthian Church, St. Paul identifies who Moses is speaking to face-to-face – the Holy Spirit. And in so doing, he includes the Holy Spirit in the identity and Being of YHWH. Recall again our discussion of substituting the word *Lord* for the divine legal name; this is precisely what St. Paul is doing here in verse 17, just as he did in 1 Corinthians 8 and Philippians 2 with Jesus. He is stating rather matter of factly that YHWH is the Spirit, or to rephrase it, the Holy Spirit is YHWH, thus suggesting the same sort of shared Being between the Father and the Holy Spirit as we saw last week between Jesus and the Father. As such, we get a sense that, for St. Paul (and by extension, the other New Testament writers and early church), YHWH is Triune and therefore worship of the Son and the Holy Spirit alongside the Father as the One God is not only permissible, it is required; to worship God in Spirit and Truth is to worship him as Trinity!

This brings us to a secondary, but no less important, point I would like to make from this passage: It is not that St. Paul somehow thinks that YHWH has *become* Triune by virtue of sending his Son and the Holy Spirit and thus revealing himself to be Father. This would not make sense of St. Paul's logic throughout the passages that we have looked at the last several weeks. Instead, it is only because he understands YHWH to be eternally Triune that he can look back at Exodus 34 and say without reserve that the Holy Spirit is YHWH, or that he can look back at Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and say that Jesus is YHWH. True, this was not fully revealed to us until the Incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but it is the revelation of an already existing, eternally divine reality: YHWH exists as One Being in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As we said several weeks ago, all of Scripture, the Old and New Testaments taken together, has one divine Subject, the Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ.



Okay, take a deep breath. I am proud of you saints, you made it! You have hung in there through dense and long sermons that have covered a great deal of hard terrain. Hopefully you see now, at least in part, some of how we came to the doctrine of the Trinity and why it a necessary part of our faith. We cannot compromise on God's Triune nature. In fact, that is one of the reasons that the Nicene Creed is so important for our maturation in the faith: It teaches us who our God is, and as I have said, in doing so it teaches us who we are. As we saw before it also serves as a rule of faith by which we can judge all theological claims; if it doesn't measure up to the Creed, that is, if it contradicts it or changes it, throw out the proposed doctrine. This is an increasingly important function of the Creed in our present moment, and I suspect as our culture continues down its present trajectory, which elevates the supposed authority of the self above all others, having an external, historically rooted articulation of the faith will become increasingly important, especially in handing the faith down to our kids and grandkids – just as it was for the Hebrew nation as they entered into the hostile land of Canaan (recall our multiple discussion of the Shema). In this way it also teaches us to read Scripture by helping us to the true Subject matter of Scripture – the Triune God revealed in Jesus Christ. But just as importantly as these, the Creed in its liturgical setting serves as the Churches pledge of allegiance to the King of kings. And this pledge transcends national boundaries and even time; we say the same Creed as those who went before us for almost 2000 years, and we say the same Creed as our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world. It always moves me when we say the Creed with our South Sudanese brothers and sisters – by pledging our allegiance to the Triune God professed in the Creed together we are essentially making a statement about our allegiance to one another too – it is by our love for one another that the world will know that we are disciples of Christ. I pray, saints, that through the course of this series you have found a new appreciation for the Nicene Creed

and its place in our liturgy. Hopefully as we come to our time of professing it each week you will be moved to take it seriously for what it is and not think of it as just another thing to get through.

The Creed in a very real way is central to our faith; indeed, it is our faith.