

Sermon: Holy Trinity Sunday

Text: Acts 2:22-36 (vv.33,36)

Theme: The Holy Trinity

Goal: To present the doctrine of the Holy Trinity as confessed in the three Ecumenical Creeds, based on the Holy Scriptures.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: What do you think of the Athanasian Creed that we confess at this Holy Trinity Sunday? At a first view, it seems that it confuses more than explains... Why do we need Creeds, Confessions, and formulas of faith and belief?

The number of churches is growing every day. Each church claims she has the truth. For some people, “every church leads to God”, - by different ways, of course. Do you agree to this? – I heard a preacher saying to a big audience last week: *I don't mind if you are Catholic, Protestant, Reformed, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or whatever... We have all the same god!!!* – NO! We know THE ONE who says: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through me!” (John 14:6).

From the very beginning of Christianity, false interpretations of the Scriptures were common. Jesus Christ was accepted as a good man by some groups, but He was not recognised as God. Others claimed that they were especially enlightened people and that they had received special revelations from God, - apart from the Scripture. The Holy Spirit was just a manifestation for some, not true God. Heresies and more heresies, based on man's reason, caused divisions and split the church. (There is nothing new under the sun...)

The Holy Apostles not only preached the truth but wrote it down as well. The New Testament was formed slowly. Paul warned the Galatians: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the One who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!” (Galatians 1:6-8). This harsh attitude of Paul explains the strong statement in the Athanasian Creed, which says: *Whoever wishes to be saved must, above all else, hold the true Christian Faith. Whoever does not keep this faith in all points will certainly perish forever.*

As Bibles were not accessible to the ordinary people (Bibles were all hand copied), it was necessary to have something short to be memorized to confess the Christian faith. The first public Confession of Faith preached by the apostles was that **Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ**, the Messiah, - as we heard in Peter’s sermon on Pentecost Day. (Also: Paul in Acts 9:22). The Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus. God was reconciled with humankind through the sacrifice and resurrection of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

I – The Apostles’ Creed

As the Christian Church began to grow not only among the Jews, but also among the Gentiles, who didn’t have the Old Testament background and didn’t know about the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, some more statements were added to the person of Jesus Christ: He is the Lord, He is the Son of God, He died on the cross and was raised again on the third day... and so on. Parts of the main teaching and preaching of the Apostles were collected and put

together. We don't know who created the final version of the Apostles' Creed, the version we use in our regular Services and that the children are learning at the Sunday School. This formula of faith was used by the candidates to Baptism and also to recognize the true Christians when someone new arrived in an established church somewhere. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are confessed briefly and boldly in this Creed.

II – The Nicene Creed

When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire and Emperor Constantine became a Christian, the church was spread all around the Empire, with several different ways of worship. There was a lack of unity, and many were questioning if Jesus was really God. Some were questioning the role of the Holy Spirit as well. The Emperor called a meeting of around 300 leaders of the church to the city of Nicaea (actually in Turkey), to preserve the Biblical truth and the unity of the church. The Nicene Creed was formulated in that meeting, stating firmly: *...Jesus Christ, God of God, Light, of Light, very God of very God... who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven...*

III – The Athanasian Creed

Eventually the Athanasian Creed was formulated, around the year 500 A.D. It got the name "Athanasian Creed", but it was not really written by Athanasius, a strong defender of the Christian faith, but by a committee. The main issues were about the Holy Trinity and about the Person of Christ. (We confessed today only the part about the Holy Trinity, not the second part of the Athanasian Creed about Jesus, true man and true God). Some of the issues questioned were: Is the Father God? Is Jesus God? Is the Holy Spirit God? Do we have three gods???

NO! There is only One God in three persons, *equal in glory and co-eternal in majesty*. The many revelations in the Holy

Scriptures about God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were quoted and compared to write a summary of the biblical teachings. Nothing was written that was not in the Bible.

Conclusion: God is not someone or something that we can imagine or mould according to our wishes as many do it. The pagan religions were all formed by human imagination according to personal experiences, observations and invented stories. Several branches of the Christian Churches still follow the same pattern as church leaders proclaim personal visions and new revelations against the Holy Scriptures, confusing and deceiving people.

A Biblical Commentary wrote: *Truth in religion is not a matter of taste. It is a matter of temporal and eternal destiny. Has God left us on our own to struggle for such important truth? If so, we are left to the vagaries of human opinion. The good news is that God has provided a means whereby the truth – all the truth we need – is communicated to us,* (Series C, p. 161) and this is the Holy Scripture, summarized in the Creeds and in some other documents of the Christian Church written by the church fathers. We don't rely our faith on these documents, but we rely our faith on God's merciful promises in Christ revealed in the Holy Scripture by the Holy Spirit, and put together in short in the Creeds.

We confess and believe what Peter preached at Pentecost: **“Jesus of Nazareth... exalted to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear... Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”**

May God preserve us in the true faith till we reach His throne in heaven, were we will see the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in all glory and majesty forever. Amen.

And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and
forevermore. (2 Corinthians 13:14). Amen. (Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 26.05.2013)