

“ALL THE DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD”

by Rev. Victor Kim

John 3:1-17

(05-30-21) Trinity

Hello and happy anniversary to RPC! It's a joy to be with you today as we mark the 61st anniversary of RPC. We celebrate the wonderful people who have worked so faithfully and joyfully to first begin and then support this congregation over many years but more importantly, we celebrate God's faithfulness to us as God's people, as God's church for all these years!

Hopefully many of you will have had time to watch the worship service from 1986 which was posted to our Facebook and YouTube pages. It's wonderful to see Tony Plomp and others from the congregation. Much has changed and yet much has remained the same. Many faces are different but the mission of the church is the same, how to share the love of Jesus with the people in our community, how to work with God in the unveiling of the kingdom of God in our midst.

Today is also Trinity Sunday, a day when we mark a theological doctrine of the church, that God is Trinitarian, three in one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now that might seem irrelevant in this day and age, but hopefully as we will see, it makes all the difference in the world.

Have you heard the story of a woman who many years ago was visiting in Paris when she came across the most wonderful painting which could be hers for the bargain price of \$150,000 dollars? She immediately sent a telegram to her husband in New York saying that she absolutely loved the painting and wondered if she could have it for her birthday. He replied by asking that this telegram be sent in reply: **No, price too high.** The clerk at Western Union however, made one tiny error in sending the telegram. This is what was sent to the woman: **No price too high.** The meaning was absolutely reversed for lack of a comma!

What a difference such a small thing can make! Now this is delving into the obscure, but stay with me here. At the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., called by the Emperor Constantine, the leaders of the early church debated the nature of Jesus. Some argued that Jesus was divine, but not exactly the same as God the Father. They argued that God the Father was the first and that Jesus, while still divine, was the first creation of God the Father, perfect, but not quite the same as the Father. Others, however, insisted that the Son and the Father were the same, different persons but still the same, of the same substance, that Jesus was begotten of the Father, not made.

So, the Council of Nicaea debated, not whether Jesus was divine, but how he was divine. In a way, it boiled down to one letter of the alphabet although it would have been a letter of the

Greek alphabet. Sometimes a comma, or the lack of it, can change the meaning of an entire sentence. ***At Nicaea, one letter, the Greek letter “iota,” from which we get the letter “i,” changed the course of civilization and history.*** There were many who understood that Jesus was one with God the Father. They would have agreed with many passages in scripture, such as John’s gospel account when Jesus says, I and the Father are one, or when Jesus declares that he is in the Father and the Father is in him, or that anyone who has seen him has seen the Father. But there were others for whom the idea of God being more than only the Father was impossible to accept. They charged that by making Jesus equal to God it somehow diluted God’s nature, his absolute transcendence, and so they contended that Jesus was not the same as God, but was God’s first act of creation. Jesus was divine, but not in the same way that the Father was divine. At some point God the Father created Jesus. In the Greek these two concepts boil down to two words ***which are differentiated by just one letter.***

Homo-ousios, means of the same substance, whereas homoi-ousios means of like substance. Jesus was either of the same substance as God the Father or he was of like substance as the Father. ***Just one letter, just one iota, separating the two, but so much of the Christian faith and theology turns on whether that letter is in or out.***

Ultimately when the bishops gathered at Nicaea finally voted on the matter, it was decided by 316 to 2 that Jesus was of the same substance, homo-ousios, as the Father. The bishops at Nicaea issued a statement of belief, the Nicene Creed, which states so eloquently the results of the decision reached at Nicaea. In part the Nicene Creed reads, ***We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father. Through him all things were made.***

Did you stay with me? You may be asking yourself, so what? What difference does it make whether Jesus is of the same substance or of like substance as God the Father? Doesn’t it all come out the same in the end? Isn’t it really nitpicking, like asking how many angels can dance on the head of a pin?

Today is Trinity Sunday and the fact is that whether Jesus is true God from true God, begotten and not made, or whether he is the first and greatest creation of God, matters more than we might realize. The difference is in whether we have come to worship in Jesus Christ a man, a great man, even a divine creation of God, or whether we come to worship he who is God the Son, of the same substance as God the Father and God the Spirit.

It makes a big difference for us just as it did for Nicodemus in our text from John’s gospel this morning. Nicodemus, a Pharisee and leader of the Jews, came to Jesus by night and spoke with Jesus in a way which makes one believe that he had some things stirring in his heart. He

came by night to seek Jesus, a big risk for a man in his position. But he had a hunger which needed to be addressed.

And the truth is that if Jesus was just a great man, if he wasn't fully God, then Nicodemus' needs and all the needs of every person who hungers for truth, for meaning, for understanding about who we are and why we are, cannot be met in Jesus. If Jesus is not truly God, one in Being with the Father, then God did not truly enter into the world and take on human flesh for our sakes.

Even though God loves us so much, we know that we continue to fail in loving him or loving our neighbour as we ought. ***The question isn't what will we do about that, but rather what will God do about it?*** But if Jesus isn't fully God, then what God did about our sin wouldn't be enough. He couldn't be our Saviour unless he was fully God.

Our reading from the gospel this morning states, ***God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.***

If the central narrative of the Christian faith is that God so loved the world that he chose to become one of us in Jesus Christ and lived and died on the cross and was resurrected to life from the dead to offer us salvation and eternal life, ***then whether that Jesus Christ was truly God or something less, makes a huge difference. If Jesus is not God, then God did not love us enough to die for us, and if God didn't die for us, and we cannot save ourselves, then what hope is there for us?***

All because of one letter, all because of one letter, because Jesus is God, on dark nights when we wonder if our life has any meaning and purpose, we can wonder instead about the height, the breadth, the depth of God's love and know that we can never fall outside the outstretched arms of Christ. ***All because of one letter, because Christ is God,*** on bright mornings when the world awakes and we open our eyes to a new day and we hear the voice of our children and we feel kiss of our spouse and feel the touch of the hand of those we love...on such days when we know that life is good and that life is a gift, we also can know that Jesus, our Lord and God, is the One who made all this for us. ***Because Jesus is God,*** when we have questions and doubts, when we fail and don't live up to our convictions, we can turn to Christ whose words have the power to take away sin and bring light out of darkness and heal every hurt. ***Because Christ is God,*** when our heart breaks for children who are starving and for people living in fear; when we reach out to a sibling fighting an addiction or a friend facing a crumbling relationship, we know that we can reach out to Christ who said, "whatsoever you do to the least among you, you do it to me."

If Christ is not God, then we cannot hope to touch the living Spirit of Christ, in the lives of the people we love...nor in the lives of the poor, nor in the lives of those with whom we worship, nor in the lives of those with whom we strive to build a better world. ***What difference does it make? Just one letter makes all the difference in the world.*** On this Trinity Sunday, together with the historic, apostolic, Spirit led church of Jesus Christ throughout the world, we confess, “Jesus is Lord.” He is the Holy One through whom all the galaxies, planets, oceans, mountains, canyons and plains were made...yet he knows our name.¹ ***What difference does it make? It makes all the difference in the world!***

61 years after the beginning of RPC, we still gather to worship, whether on-line or very soon, in person again, but we gather to worship Jesus, not as a good man or even a great man and not even as the first-born divine creation of God the Father, but as fully God, of the same nature and substance as God the Father and God the Spirit, ***we gather to praise and worship God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three in one, one in three, all God, equally God, eternally God.***

We will never fully understand the mystery of the Trinity, but it is enough to know that we will never be without the hope, joy and love which are ours because God so loved the world that by his Son Jesus Christ, he has redeemed us and saved us.

Nicodemus didn't get it at first. But he did get it eventually. He did get it that because Jesus was the Messiah, because he was the Christ, because he died and rose again, his quest had found an answer, his hunger was satisfied. ***It made all the difference for him.***

In our hunger, in our search, in our journey, ***we may also not get it at first, but I pray that we will get it eventually***, that we will find our answer in Jesus, who is God, and know that just as it did for Nicodemus and just like it did for the countless host who have gone before us, ***that it may also make all the difference for us.***

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

¹ James Schmitmeyer, www.BlueCollarPreacher.com