

Whit-Monday  
St. John 3:16-21  
June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC  
Simpsonville, SC  
Pastor Jerald Dulas

He Who Believes in Him

*In Nomine Iesu!*

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

**Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:**

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, Who, of Thy tender love toward us sinners, hast given us Thy Son, that, believing on Him, we might have everlasting life: grant us, we beseech Thee, Thy Holy Spirit that we may continue steadfast in this faith to the end, and may come to everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. John contains one of the most quoted and recognizable verses in the Bible. It is so well known that many people just use the book, chapter and verse (John 3:16), and people will know what that verse says. At least they will know it according to their own understanding. But as it is with all of Scripture, the Bible should not be understood according to one verse. Scripture verses must be understood according to the context in which they exist. This is especially true of popular verses that the common man would know and quote (usually out of context and according to their own misunderstanding).

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." For most Christians these words are simple enough. We know Who "God" is. We know who "His only begotten Son" is. And we know what it means to "believe in Him." But without proper catechesis, the world interprets these things according to their own understanding. When we speak of "God" we are referring to the Triune Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Sometimes when we speak of "God" we are, as is the case in this verse, speaking of just God the Father. We know that the "only begotten Son" is referring to the Lord + Jesus, the Christ; He Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary. We know that He is both God and man. He is equal to God the Father according to His Divine Nature, as we confessed in the Athanasian Creed yesterday, and will again next Sunday.

When we speak of "God" we who are properly catechized know that we are referring to the Triune Lord God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. What many people do not realize with this verse is that all three of the Persons of the Trinity are in it. Clearly, we have references to God, Who is the Father, and His Son, Who is the Lord + Jesus, but the Holy Ghost is a part of this verse, too. For He is in the little word "believe." Many people erroneously think that belief is something that they do, something they have to drum up inside of themselves, some work they have to do. But Scripture is clear that belief is a work of the Holy Ghost. Where the Holy Ghost is at work in the means of grace, He is creating and sustaining faith in those who hear the Word of God. He is creating in us belief.

Remember, my dear friends, that this pericope is a part of a larger discourse of our Lord + Jesus with Nicodemus, the Pharisee who comes to our Lord + Jesus in the middle of the night to question

Him. He comes in the night because He believes on the Lord + Jesus, but also fears the other Pharisees, who do not believe. We will get the rest of that discourse next Sunday on the Feast of the Holy Trinity. This is one of the reasons it is important to observe this day of Whit-Monday, because it includes the part of the third chapter of St. John which is not included on the Feast of the Holy Trinity. Remember also what the main context of the discussion between Nicodemus and our Lord + Jesus was. They were discussing Holy Baptism, being born from above through water and the Holy Ghost.

Holy Baptism is a tied to the Feast of Pentecost. It is how we as the Church, as the Body of Christ, receive the Holy Ghost, and with Him faith and trust in the Lord + Jesus. In the sermon that St. Peter gave to those who were gathered in Jerusalem on that very first Pentecost Sunday, He declared to the crowds after they were “cut to the heart” that they were to repent and be baptized. They were to confess their sins against the Lord God, and be washed in the waters of Holy Baptism, where the Holy Ghost cleansed them from their sins, and renewed their faith in the One, True God.

This connection to Holy Baptism is why this day is called “Whit-Monday.” Whit-Monday is short for “White Monday.” The Feast of Pentecost is also called “Whit-Sunday.” Whit-Sunday is short for “White Sunday.” This designation of “White” is a reference to Holy Baptism. Even though the color of the day for the Octave of the Feast of Pentecost is red, the color of the Holy Ghost, and the color of fire; of being cleansed from sin by the fire of the Holy Ghost, these days are referred to as Whitsun Week. The week of White Sunday. This is actually a reference to the ancient practice of baptizing on the Feast of Pentecost.

Many baptisms in the early Church took place at the Easter Vigil, and the remnant of that practice is why that Service contains a remembrance of Holy Baptism. Sometimes because a person was ill, or some other reason prevented them from receiving Holy Baptism at Easter, they were baptized on Feast of Pentecost. Just like those who were baptized on Easter wore their new white robes the entire following week after their baptisms, those who were baptized on Pentecost would also wear their new white robes for an entire week. This was to show the Church, and the newly baptized, that they were clothed with the righteousness of the Christ. They were clothed with the new white robe of the Lord’s righteousness. They were gifted with the Holy Ghost, Who created and sustained faith in them to believe on the Lord + Jesus.

This is also why the minister turns toward the congregation at the beginning of the Service and blesses the congregation with the Name that was placed upon them in Holy Baptism. It is a reminder by the Pastor to the congregation that they have been gifted with the Holy Ghost and faith, and are clothed with the righteousness of the Christ. Having received that blessing from the minister, we can now worship our Lord God in truth and purity. We can worship Him, knowing that He has made us His children. He has removed our sin and shame, and brought us out of darkness into His marvelous light; the light of everlasting life.

This is what the very familiar words of St. John, chapter three, verse sixteen mean. It is not our work of believing that saves us and gives us eternal life. No, my dear friends, as the final verse of today’s pericope states, our righteous deeds have been done in Lord God. Any good works we possess, especially the good work of faith, is a gift of the Lord God. We have these gifts because the Lord God gave them to us. We have righteousness because we are clothed, through the waters of Holy Baptism, we the righteous deeds that our Lord + Jesus, the Lord God and man, who came down from Heaven to make us His people.

The best news is that this promise of eternal life is for all those in the world who believe in Him—the Lord + Jesus. The Epistle from the tenth Chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles is another sermon of St. Peter, after he had met Cornelius and his family believed in the Lord + Jesus, and were baptized. The Epistle declares that salvation is not just for the Jews, but for all the world. Our Lord and

Savior did not just die for the Jews. He did not just atone for the sins of those who believe in Him. He atoned for the sins of the whole world. He did this so that whoever believes in Him should not perish eternally in Hell, but have eternal life. This is the good news for us poor, miserable sinners, who are not born of Jewish blood. Salvation is for both Jews and Gentiles alike.

The Holy Ghost was poured out upon the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost, but all the Jews and Proselytes who had come to Jerusalem for the Feast, also received the Holy Ghost through repentance and Holy Baptism. From these believing Jews, the Church also spread to the Gentile world, and into all the world. So that all the world who believes on the Lord + Jesus through the work of the Holy Ghost working in those who confess their sins and cling in faith to the Lord + Jesus for the forgiveness found through Him, might have everlasting life. The Spirit of the Lord fills the world. Let us be glad and rejoice that He has enlightened us with faith, and made us citizens of Heaven. For through Holy Baptism, He has created faith in us to believe on the Lord + Jesus as our one and only Savior. He has clothed us with our Lord's righteousness, therefore, my dear friends, our sins have been covered over and we are free from sin. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:**

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

**The Votum:**

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria!*