

I.N.R.I. Dangerous words. Divisive words. Deadly words. The words that you just confessed in the Athanasian Creed. *"This is the catholic faith; whoever does not believe it faithfully and firmly cannot be saved."* Our world with its man made religions accuses Christianity of being divisive. Our world enslaved in The Lie is tolerant of everything, but The Truth. Satan knows that these are dangerous words.... *"And the catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity, neither confusing the persons or dividing the substance."* Satan whispers The LIE - *"You can be your own gods" - "Make up a god in your own image." "Do what you want - no rules - no law - that is really living."* It is Satan's deceptive way of showing us all the world's power and pleasure and promising, *"All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."* Satan fears the Name of the Triune God washed over the heads of captive sons and daughters of Adam for it frees them for life as children of God. These are deadly words - *"But it is also necessary for everlasting salvation that one faithfully believe the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ."* My old sinful flesh - the old Adam in me - original sin - or the idol name "ME" hates these words. My sinful reason imagines that salvation is escape from my flesh, but Jesus comes into my flesh to save my flesh. My sinful reason imagines that it has the strength to earn its own salvation, but Jesus alone on the cross proclaims, "It is Finished!" My fallen reason and strength can't believe in such a Savior or even make a decision to come to Him. These words kill the idol of "ME" daily drowning him in contrition and repentance that I might die and that Christ might live in me by Holy Spirit given faith in love towards my neighbor as a true child of God the Father.

These words were so dangerous that Nicodemus, a respected scholar of the Holy Scriptures, a very religious man, a government official sneaks in the darkness to hear them from Jesus. Meeting with Jesus was dangerous. His Words brought division. His teaching threatened national pride and worldly peace. The rulers had already decreed that any who confessed Jesus should be thrown out of public discourse. Cloaked in darkness Nicodemus comes to Jesus confessing, *"Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."* Far from complementing his confession Jesus kills him: *"Amen, Amen, I tell you: Unless someone is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* These words also kill the idol I call "ME" - Here I must repent of all my wisdom, ways, feelings, and religious experiences and rejoice that I am: **Born From Above Into the Mystery Of The Holy Trinity**. Satan and

the LIE always bring division. His LIE tore mankind from their loving Creator. The LIE made man ashamed of his own skin. The LIE ripped Adam's marriage apart setting male against female. In the last two weeks we have seen Satan using abuse of power and lying words to tear our nation apart. It was not just that George Floyd was executed by a Minneapolis police officer for trying to pass a counterfeit \$20 bill. Nor was it just that rioters and looters turned peaceful protests for justice into mayhem and willful destruction of whole neighborhoods. Satan loves to divide and destroy. We as a nation need to repent and turn away from The LIE. The LIE that Christ's Church preaching The TRUTH is non-essential. Governors who usurped the God-given first amendment right of Christians to freely assemble and exercise their religion - even using a show of force to threaten or arrest Christian congregation's peacefully assembling - handed out free masks for those who wanted to gather for protest - groups far greater than 10. Only as an afterthought did any of the news cycles warn that maybe the mobs that assembled should test for COVID-19. A virus that infects the majority with symptoms so mild that they never knew they had it in the first place. We live in a world that says with Pontius Pilate, "What is Truth?"

Nicodemus is baffled by Jesus teaching of being born from above. Certainly we cannot return to our mother's womb and be born again. Jesus' Word is the Truth. Jesus is Absolute Truth in our skin. Everyone who is of the Truth hears Jesus' voice - continues in His Word - and knowing the Truth they are set free. What is this mysterious freeing truth? (Vs.5-8) Unless one is born of "water and the Spirit" you are captive in Satan's kingdom of lies, sins, death, deception. Jesus is speaking here of the sacrament of holy baptism. Contrary to those Christians who want to keep some glory for saving themselves - there is not a separate "water" baptism and a "Spirit" baptism. Jesus teaches that there is only "One baptism for the remission of sins." God the Holy Spirit would write through St. Paul: *Eph 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; (5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism; (6) one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."* Conceived and born in Adam's rebellion and captive to Satan - our flesh cannot save us from the hell we deserve. We need salvation to come from outside of our skin, to breathe us alive again with the breath of life - the Holy Spirit. Just as we witness the effects of the wind, but it remains invisible - so the Holy Spirit works bringing us from death to life in Christ Jesus and reuniting us to God our Father.

Nicodemus is astonished. How can it be that my family heritage counts for nothing towards my salvation? If my skin is darker or lighter

brown that doesn't save me. True justice and peace are not found by me forcing my will on others. They are not found in me - as if I can boast that I have earned God's favor. Listen to the mysterious truth you were born into from above: (vs.10-15) Christ Jesus alone reveals the mysterious heart of God. God did not abandoned His creation to damn it, but from eternity sought to reconcile sinful mankind to Himself through the sacrifice of His only begotten Son. Justice would be met on Calvary where Jesus - the Son of Man - would be lifted up upon the pole of the cross to be the One Sacrifice that would forever satisfy God's justice and restore peace through blood bought forgiveness of our sins.

This is the reality of the Name sealed upon you in the waters of your baptism. Morning and evening remember who you are a baptized child of the Triune God redeemed by the cross of Jesus. Freed from Satan's LIE that turns you in on yourself. Freed through forgiveness to forgive your neighbor who sins against you and to pray for those who persecute you. Even to love them, as God the Father loves you.

Behold the mystery of the Trinity who birthed you from above. (Vs.16-17). God the Father loved you. God the Father gave His only begotten Son as the sacrifice for you. God the Holy Spirit creates in you a new heart to trust only in Jesus. He keeps you in this baptismal faith through His Word until life everlasting. Our God is the only God who saves.

In 1527 as Dr. Martin Luther was stricken with a severe illness that he thought would end his life. While false teachers were tearing protestant Europe apart and the plague struck hard in Wittenberg. Luther wrote his "Confession Concerning the Lord's Supper" against Ulrich Zwingli who denied Jesus' real presence in bread and wine. Luther confesses the mystery of the Trinity and our birth from above writing: "*Thirdly, I believe in the Holy Spirit, who with the Father and the Son is one true God and proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son, yet is a distinct person in the one divine essence and nature. By this Holy Spirit, as a living, eternal, divine gift and endowment, all believers are adorned with faith and other spiritual gifts, raised from the dead, freed from sin, and made joyful and confident, free and secure in their conscience. For this is our assurance if we feel this witness of the Spirit in our hearts, that God wishes to be our Father, forgive our sin, and bestow everlasting life on us.*

*These are the three persons and one God, who has given himself to us all wholly and completely, with all that he is and has. The Father gives himself to us, with heaven and earth and all the creatures, in order that they may serve us and benefit us. But this gift has become obscured and useless through Adam's fall. Therefore the Son himself subsequently gave himself and bestowed all his works, sufferings, wisdom, and righteousness, and reconciled us to the Father, in order that restored to life and righteousness, we might also know and have the Father and his gifts.*

*But because this grace would benefit no one if it remained so profoundly hidden and could not come to us, the Holy Spirit comes and gives himself to us also, wholly and completely. He teaches us to understand this deed of Christ which has been manifested to us, helps us receive and preserve it, use it to our advantage and impart it to others, increase and extend it. He does this both inwardly and outwardly—inwardly by means of faith and other spiritual gifts, outwardly through the gospel, baptism, and the sacrament of the altar, through which as through three means or methods he comes to us and inculcates the sufferings of Christ for the benefit of our salvation.*

*Therefore I maintain and know that just as there is no more than one gospel and one Christ, so also there is no more than one baptism. And that baptism in itself is a divine ordinance, as is his gospel also. And just as the gospel is not false or incorrect for the reason that some use it or teach it falsely, or disbelieve it, so also baptism is not false or incorrect even if some have received or administered it without faith, or otherwise misused it.* Luther, M. (1999). Luther's works, vol. 37: Word and Sacrament III. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 37, pp. 365–366). Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

In these dark days of COVID-19, unrest, injustice, and rioting. Let us find comfort in the mystery of the Holy Trinity. We are all of one blood - created and cared for by God our Father. We are all redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ poured out for sinners upon the cross. Risen from the dead He is enthroned as King ruling over this world through this message of grace, mercy, and peace through the Truth of His Word. We are all made alive again only by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. The Holy Spirit makes us holy washing away our sins daily and richly with Jesus' blood. He makes us holy by keeping us in the one True Faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. He makes us holy by clothing Jesus' perfect life upon us. Forgiven we are freed to forgive - knowing that death will not hold our bodies, but we shall rise to life everlasting. This is the universal Christian faith - by God's grace alone we believe it faithfully and firmly. Amen.

Rev. Nathan J. Rusert, Pastor  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, LCMS, Tell City, IN