

## The Spiral of Faith—6th Sunday after the Epiphany

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[Jeremiah 17:5-10](#)

[1 Corinthians 15:12-20](#)

[Luke 6:17-26](#)

*Sermon delivered at Christ the Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Hamden, CT*

I am so excited to celebrate Jess and Anna's baptism today. And not only will they be baptized *today*, but they will also be confirmed this Spring at Pentecost, along with Grace. And part of both the baptismal and confirmation process is learning. So, Jess, Anna, Grace and I, and also with Phil and Jonathan (and with Kat N, and Rob H. as well before), have been doing a lot of learning and discussing. And most recently we were discussing the mystery of the Holy Trinity—our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit three persons and one essence, eternally three-in-one, and one-in-three.

And, I think, as most pastors do when teaching about the Trinity, I was flailing and failing.

Using the writings of both Lutheran and Eastern expressions of Christianity, we came to the conclusion as a class, that we are not capable of knowing "*what*" God is. To search to the bottom of God's essence would be to master God. And a god that is not absolutely free and unsearchable would not be God.

But we *do* know, by the witness of Scripture and our Ancestors in the Church, "*that*" God is, of course. And we also know "*how*" God is. The "*how*" of God, we mused based on the persons of the Trinity, is relationship. The Father begets and loves the Son, the Son adores and yearns for the Father, both the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit. Neither person can exist without the other. A parent is only a parent because they have child, and vice versa.

Even more, the Holy Spirit binds together all God's people, and brings us into this eternal threefold relationship... And that is what Jeremiah is hinting at, I believe, at when he writes: Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, **whose trust is the Lord**. The Hebrew word beneath the English "blessed" originally meant to kneel. To kneel before something, is to give it honor and respect. So, "respected" are they, "honored" are they—you could say—these are all different shades of meaning of this word in Hebrew. Respected are the people who trust in God, and **whose trust is God**.

The opposite of this trust, Jeremiah goes on to warn the people of Judah and Israel, is to put our full hope in human leaders, and later, beyond the selection we have today, in verse 11, Jeremiah warns of those who trust in amassing wealth as well. Both human leaders and physical wealth all will fade. But the Lord does not. "Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord."

Our trust *is* the Lord. That is a very important point. Your faith *that* God is, your trust *how* God is—is God in you, the Holy Spirit. In our Lutheran expression of Christianity, we make a big deal about sin. Sin is our predisposition to be utterly self-oriented. Sin is our disconnection from God because of that. So, *if* we believe, then it has to be God—the Holy Spirit—in *us*, believing, in relationship with God our source.

This trust, this yearning, is dynamic and changing. In confirmation class, we called this process, this life of faith—a Spiral. A spiral looks like a circle; when you're in it, it feels like a circle. But a spiral is a spinning, circling process that is always, however slowly, drawing us nearer to God, and transforming us. God pulls us ever and ever closer to God.

But spirals are slow. We get dizzy. We might even fall down and lose our way. The path is never straight ahead, and it feels like we're going in circles. This Spiral of faith, in which Jess and Anna mark a crucial point in today, this process... is painful. Which is why we heard that Jesus too was blessing people today. Out on the level plain in Luke's Gospel, Jesus is blessing people, honoring people, respecting people, who are *obviously* not blessed. Poor, hungry, weeping, and reviled people.

Not much has changed in our culture, those kinds of folks are certainly not called revered, respected, lucky, or blessed now either. They are pitied maybe, but that's about it. Here Jesus is *actively* blessing them. He is saying, now, I the Son of God, I am declaring: you are blessed. Because, this process, this spiral, we are all caught up in—that Jess and Anna are getting caught up in—it hurts. Jesus, himself, was poor and wept for this world—Christ, the Son, was reviled and hated and killed—and as the Spirit, believing in us, gives us a yearning for a God's kingdom, yearning for life, yearning for connection—it stings.

I've grown to really respect Jess and Anna and Grace. So as Jess and Anna come to the waters of Baptism today, I'm not going to lie to them and say this spiral of faith is all roses and bunnies. There are lots of ways to talk about Baptism. Washing and cleansing of sin, of division, between us and God is a popular way. But as the Church, we also talk of Baptism as a death. In St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians today he is talking a great deal about Christ's death. And as you all know, Jesus died, the Son died. Part of God is this death, just as part of God the Son is New Life.

Yearning for God's kingdom where the poor are blessed, where those who weep are comforted, where the hungry are filled, yearning for those things brings us into death. Because in order for

that love of other human beings to happen: our own desires must wither, our need to be right dries up, our tight-fisted, fear-dominated, way of life must eventually die, like an unwatered tree. Baptism is a sign of this death, the ups and downs of the faith spiral. Paul says in order for Christ to have risen he had to die. Christ was the first harvest from the land of the dead. And just so, we have to die to sin, in order for us to rise.

Baptism is our gateway to this Godly-death. And our gateway to the New Life of Christ. Cursed, indeed, are those who think they can do it all themselves. Woe to those who try to dominate their destiny with will-power and wealth. But blessed are they, honored and happy are they—who are swept up by the Holy Spirit, who enter the spiral, who yearn for God our source, who endure the death of all that is not God in them, and who are made to shine like Christ the Son.

So, as Jess and Anna are swept, washed, buried and raised today—remember too, that you have entered the same process. Together we are all *in* God, who is our dancing, yearning, three-in-one, Holy Trinity.

*Amen.*