

1. We don't have a theoretical God, but a real one. Nonetheless, classroom learning does have its place. In God's book, we sometimes wish the answers were in the back of the book, but with the Bible we're left with stories and poetry rather than a textbook.

To be certain, the Bible has plenty of answers to life's questions. Paul writes to Timothy saying, "**All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,**" But on Trinity Sunday, we sometimes wish the Bible had a book or chapter on the teaching of the Trinity. In fact, the word Trinity never appears in the Bible.

In a three-volume set, Franz Pieper wrote his 1,689 page, three-volume magnum opus, *Christian Dogmatics* between 1917 and 1924. My best estimate is that it contains twice as many words as the Bible itself. Drawing from Scripture, it is that textbook you've always wanted, handling Scripture by topic rather than in stories and poetry. In fact, the book has twenty-six pages devoted just to the topic of the Holy Trinity.

It's a great book that if we're honest, not many LCMS Lutherans have read. I'll confess to you that although I use it often for reference, I haven't read it cover to cover. But the life of the Holy Trinity is not lived in textbooks and lectures, but through action. Our Trinitarian God is a God of Action, not theory.

2. We don't have a theoretical God, but a real one. Nicodemus was not talking to a theoretical man, but a real one. This real God-man, Jesus was there to give Nicodemus something more than book learning.

Nicodemus must have been in need of a remedial class because Jesus wonders, "**Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?**" Nicodemus was certainly no dummy because he was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews, but maybe he was so busy learning about God, He didn't realize that God was right there in front of Him.

That evening, the Son told Nicodemus that the way to the Father is through the Spirit. One God in Trinity, and the trinity in unity. "**Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."** Jesus is pointing to Baptism as the point of entry into the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Baptized into the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the Spirit gives us new birth in Christ that we may stand before the Father as holy and righteous in His sight.

Nicodemus did eventually come around; after Jesus' death, Nicodemus brought seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes for Jesus' body. This was worth a considerable sum of money. We have reason to believe that Nicodemus did indeed become a follower of Christ. To be brought into the life of the Holy Trinity, Nicodemus didn't take just one more class, he sat at the feet of Jesus because our Trinitarian God is a God of Action, not theory.

3. We don't have a theoretical God, but a real one. The Trinity does not wish to be known primarily through a picture of three overlapping circles or a three leaf clover or what have you. He makes Himself known through action.

The Trinity has always existed. The Father has always existed. The Son of God was present at the creation and took place in forming the universe. The Spirit of God hovered over the deep and was there, too. Before He became human in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Son of God appeared to people in the Old Testament. He was there as Moses made a serpent on a pole to heal the people from the snake bites in the wilderness.

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.” Salvation isn't just an idea. Salvation is our Triune God acting in history. The Lord who directed Moses to create the bronze serpent would Himself become that bronze serpent to hang on the cross for me and for you.

It doesn't take a master's degree in theology. Believe in the Triune God who in the person of Jesus Christ dies and rises for your sins. God rolls up His sleeves acts on this Earth: teaching Nicodemus, redeeming sinners, and putting death to death because our Trinitarian God is a God of Action, not theory.

4. We don't have a theoretical God, but a real one. This real God comes to you today. He invites you to turn the pages of Scripture. He invites you to participate in the mystery of the Trinity as you learn from God's Word this Trinity in action.

Live out your baptismal calling. **“Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”**” This being born again consists not of making a personal decision for Jesus Christ or having a special tingling in your heart. This being born again consists of dying to sin as you confess your sins and stop committing them, and rising again to new life as you follow in the footsteps of Jesus. We are only baptized once, but we live our lives as a continual dying to self as we cut out those things which would prevent us from participating in the community of the Holy Trinity.

In a historical fiction television show, the Chosen, the director uses creative license to speculate about the lives of the people in the Bible. He depicts Nicodemus as someone who at his heart wants to follow Jesus, but cannot leave his comfortable life of being a religious leader. In a moving scene, Nicodemus anonymously throws a bag of coins over a wall to Jesus' disciples to help pay for their expenses, but he crumples to the ground and quietly sobs as he realizes that he will not go with them.

What's holding you back? Many of you listening have been baptized and confirmed. What's holding you back from taking the next step in following Jesus? Take a leap of faith because our Trinitarian God is a God of Action, not theory.

5. We don't have a theoretical God, but a real one. It may seem like we're looping around back to this dry dogmatics textbook when we take a moment to examine the Athanasian Creed, but the creed we recite this day helps us know better the true and only Triune God.

All this is to say is that as we gather here today on Trinity Sunday, we gather not to discuss an idea, but the reality of who our God is. "Whoever desires to be saved must, above all, hold the catholic faith. Whoever does not keep it whole and undefiled will without doubt perish eternally." This is a matter of life and death.

Yes, there's a lot of theory in distilling alcohol, but getting it wrong in practice is the difference between methanol and ethanol. Ethanol is the key ingredient to the white lightning that can knock off your socks. Methanol makes you go blind, and taken in sufficient amounts, kills you. Both chemicals are composed entirely of carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen atoms. Methanol is only missing three atoms, but the difference is life and death.

Taking even one person out of the Trinity is an error more deadly than mistaking methanol for ethanol. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are indivisible persons in the Holy Trinity. As we study the Holy Spirit in the Bible and in supplementary resources such as the Athanasian Creed or Piepers Dogmatics, we find the path to life through Baptism, the Cross, and the Holy Supper because our Trinitarian God is a God of Action, not theory.