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

When Fr. Michael asked me to preach on Trinity Sunday back in October or November, I was cautiously optimistic. This is my first homily, but as a person with some training in Christian theology, I was excited to use the opportunity to talk with you all for a few minutes on the one Sunday in the liturgical year when we can be guaranteed to hear a sermon about God.

But that was towards the end of 2019, so…about 20 or 30 years ago. Since then we watched as tensions rose with Iran, as an impeachment trial played out, as fires ravaged Australia, as we started receiving reports of a novel coronavirus in Wuhan, and then as governments around the world shut down in response to a deadly pandemic. Sitting in quarantine, I thought, if I still get the opportunity to deliver this homily, it’s going to have to be something a little different…

And then we saw Ahmaud Arbery chased down on the road, corralled by pickup trucks, and murdered. We learned about Breonna Taylor, gunned down in her own apartment. And then we heard George Floyd call out for his mother as he was slowly killed by a police officer. These cruelties made the long shadow profound inequality too much to bear; little wonder so many have taken to the streets in protest.

And in the midst of all this, today we celebrate the feast of the Holy Trinity.

What could the Christian doctrine of the Trinity possibly contribute to our lives in such challenging times?

My answer: absolutely everything.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not some academic exercise in speculative thinking. As such, the Trinity is not a mystery to be unraveled or explained. It’s not some challenging or mystical math problem (like 1 + 1 + 1 = 1). The trinity is a mystery, to be sure, but it’s not a mystery of the sort you’d get in an Agatha Christie novel. And you can’t solve for it like you would the area of a circle.

There is a rather silly idea that talking about God is somehow easy while talking about the Trinity is hard. God…sure, we get it, but Trinity… well, that’s problematic. I don’t think that’s quite right. Our reason doesn’t break down when we start to talk about the Trinity, it breaks down when we start to talk about God.

If we treat the Trinity like a math problem, then it doesn’t make any sense…so it’s a good thing for us that it’s not a math problem. Instead, the language of the Trinity is the best language we have to talk about the Christian experience of God. I’ll say that again: the language of the Trinity is the best language we have to talk about the distinctly Christian experience of God.

To confess the Trinity is to confess one God in three persons. The unity of God is in the threeness of God. We don’t start with the one God and then add the threeness, as you might start with yourself in the morning and add a button down shirt. It’s not something extra. The threeness is essential.

This idea is firmly rooted in the early Christian experience of worship. Prayer was directed *to* the Father who loves them, *through* the Son who offers them grace, and *in* the Spirit that draws them together, as we saw in the epistle reading today: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.” This proto-Trinitarian pattern gave shape to the distinctly Christian experience. And here I say ‘proto-Trinitarian’ because it does not spell out the unity of the Godhead nor the relations between persons (as we do in the Nicaean Creed), but it does name the three.

What I’m getting at is that the Trinity is a *practical* doctrine, deeply enmeshed in the living of Christian life, and not the clever formulations of scholars.

When the first Christians encountered Jesus and the experience of salvation *through* Christ, they were led to think of him in the same way that they thought about God. And while the process of developing the precise language we use to talk about the Trinity took some centuries, this means that when we speak of the Trinity, we necessarily bring the teachings and actions of Jesus into the discussion.

And so let’s take a moment to look at this morning’s lesson from Matthew’s Gospel.

In the narrative, we are transported to a mountain top in Galilee where Jesus’ commissions his remaining disciples to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

It was no accident of the text that this commissioning takes place on top of a mountain. If we look back over Matthew’s Gospel, we discover that that mountain top acts as an important motif. Every mountain top moment in Matthew leads directly to this moment of commissioning, where Jesus life and teaching are distilled into the mission of his disciples and the future community of the church.

The devil took Jesus to a mountain top to present his final temptation: the wealth, success, and splendor of all the kingdoms of the world.

It was a mountain top upon which Jesus delivered a sermon to his disciples, saying, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

And it was a mountain in Galilee upon which Jesus cured the lame, the maimed, the blind, and the mute, and then didn’t want to send the crowd back down the mountain hungry, so he created an abundance of food from seven loaves and a few small fish.

Several chapters later, Jesus led Peter, James, and John up a high mountain to witness his transfiguration.

And it was as he sat on the Mount of Olives that Jesus taught his disciples before his death, telling them a about a king who divided his subjects into those who fed and welcomed him and those who did not. The first group then responds: ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

And so when the Gospel narrative ends on a mountaintop, we are meant to understand that this commission provides the culmination of all the other mountaintop experiences.

The love that Jesus showed to those around him, the preference he clearly demonstrated to protect and privilege the poor and vulnerable, this is the very life of the Trinity, poured out upon the world.

When this divine life became incarnate in the person of Christ, given completely in love for the world, the world couldn’t deal with it and put it to death. But on this last mountain top in Matthew, we understand – through the resurrection of Christ and his commissioning of his disciples – that love is stronger than death. This love that doesn’t compromise, even when facing a state execution, this is the model for Christian discipleship.

Love, then, is what we mean when we talk about the Trinity. It’s what we mean when we say God is three as well as one, that God is plurality as well as unity, that God is being in relation.

When we love our neighbor, created in the image of God, we imitate the divine life and make God present. This power to love, the power that initiates relationship, the power that hovers over the waters to draw order from chaos, this is the Holy Spirit in each of us, wellspring of the love that draws us together.

In the last speech he gave before his assassination, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. clearly identified that to live the life of discipleship is to love your neighbor in concrete ways:

“It's all right to talk about "long white robes over yonder," in all of its symbolism. But ultimately people want some suits and dresses and shoes to wear down here! It's all right to talk about "streets flowing with milk and honey," but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children who can't eat three square meals a day. It's all right to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day, God's preacher must talk about the new New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia, the new Los Angeles, the new Memphis, Tennessee. This is what we have to do.”

And at the end of that speech, the day before he was killed, he said:

“Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now, because I've been to the mountaintop.”

Amen.