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## Holy Trinity • Acts 2:14a, 22–36 • May 31, 2015

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The Christian confession of the Trinity is both sublime and difficult. Trying to grasp the distinction of the divine persons while maintaining the unity of the Godhead can feel like an abstraction that places God further away from us instead of drawing near. The distinctions are important as the language of the Athanasian Creed gives us proper guidance for faithfulness in our worship and public profession. But the assumed biblical narrative also remains rather hidden. The revelation of God’s mighty and saving act as it unfolds in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth is both the source and goal of our doctrine of the Trinity. Peter’s powerful sermon at Pentecost paints the Trinity in the living color of promise and fulfillment, hope beyond hope, the end of the world, and a new beginning.

Peter’s sermon is about Jesus and centers on two points: he is the Christ and he is Lord. The argument is structured as a chiasm beginning with his proof that a) Jesus is indeed the promised Christ, followed by his argument that b) God has raised Jesus up as Lord, and concluding with the confession that God has truly made Jesus b<sup>1</sup>) Lord and a<sup>1</sup>) Christ. For both arguments, Peter sets forth a passage from the Psalms as the basis for this confession. For Peter, gifted now with the Holy Spirit, all that has taken place was promised long ago and has unfolded according to God’s “definite plan and foreknowledge.” In spite of all appearances, the death of Jesus does not negate the “mighty works, wonders and signs” of God. These divine works certainly attested to the messianic presence of Jesus, but Peter says so did his crucifixion and what’s more, his resurrection! For the Davidic hope that God would “not let his Holy One see corruption” is a messianic hope. The psalm (16:8–11) drives one beyond the poetic confidence of a long-dead king and to a living confession of the Christ who though crucified has now risen: “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.” Beyond hope and expectation, the Scriptures testify to just this sort of Christ—one who dies and lives again.

But that is not all. The rejection of God’s Christ ends in a great reversal so that Jesus now rules over all things, even his enemies. Jesus is Lord and this too is promised from of old: “Yahweh said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies

your footstool” (Ps 110:1). Again, Peter shows how David speaks beyond his own context to that which is almost <sup>*Concordia Journal, Vol. 41 (2015), No. 2, Art. 9*</sup>inconceivable—the Christ is not only a king in the Davidic throne over Israel, he shares the power and authority of the divine throne, ruling over the cosmos. So what must this mean, asks Peter? It means that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, whom God delivered up to be crucified by the wicked . . . whom God raised from the dead . . . whom God gave his promised Holy Spirit to pour out on his own . . . whom God exalted to his right hand to share in his power as Lord over all things.

Here the Trinity is not an abstract concept but the self-emptying, philanthropic God who enters into the human story and takes the reigns of history from the inside, directing it to a conclusion that puts evil to an end. Here God gives us words and prayers with a new life and meaning, prayers spoken by Jesus and given to us by his Spirit that calls forth a beautiful hope: “The Lord [is] always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken. . . . You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence!”

Erik Herrmann