

Today, in my first sermon here in Ellsworth, I must already make a confession to you, my congregation. As you know, I have spent the last several years of my life studying for the ministry. I have studied the history of theology. I have studied books of the bible. I have studied our Lutheran Confessions. This large stack of books next to me represents only a small portion of the many pages I have read, reflected on, and discussed in class. I even received an award in my second year for understanding the theology of our church well. So, what is my confession? Well, put quite simply, I don't understand Baptism. I don't understand the Lord's Supper. And most of all, on this Trinity Sunday, I must admit that I do not understand the Trinity.

At this point, I figure those who have always questioned the idea of calling a man right out of seminary to lead a church with such great history are ready to stand up and make their case anew. I can just imagine the table discussions over lunch. "Did pastor really say that he didn't understand Baptism, the Lord's Supper or the Trinity?" The youth at the table jump at the chance to say, "Now I am not going to confirmation for sure." Perhaps a long time member might casually slip a copy of the small catechism on my desk for perusal. I mean if Pastor doesn't understand the basics of the faith, what about our deep, intense questions? Well, before you begin to plan for my going away dinner just a week after my installation, travel back with me and listen in on a conversation held under the cover of the night between a great prophet and an influential councilman.

As I mentioned, the scene began after the sun has taken its rest for the night. The great prophet I mentioned had spread his message openly every day. Yet, this councilman came to him under the cover of darkness. He greeted the great prophet with

much deserved flattery. After all he had heard how he changed water into wine, how he taught with authority, and healed people everywhere he went. But rather than the prophet discussing his accolades with this councilman, the prophet began to teach. What he said was strange indeed. "You must be born again." This phrase caused bewilderment to be written all over the councilman's face. The prophet's eyes, perceiving this confusion, decided to speak in a clearer, earthier way. He said, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." The bewilderment on the man's face only etched its way more deeply into his appearance. What was this new birth that Jesus spoke about? Nicodemus thought himself to be wise for good reason, but he could not perceive what Jesus had said. And what was all this talk about the wind? Jesus was right. Nicodemus had no idea where the wind came from and where it rested. Nicodemus didn't understand.

Do you? Do I? I must admit that I have no idea where the wind comes from or where to goes to either. Living up here on the hill, the wind is almost a constant reality. I feel it rush through my hair. I see it move in the trees. I know its awesome power. But as for where it comes from or where it goes, I am at a loss. If you want to see clueless about the wind, just come watch Jaimee and I try to fly a kite out here next to the church. And I guess if this rebirth, this Baptism, that Jesus speaks about is like the wind, I don't understand it either.

No doubt Nicodemus was baptized. No doubt we were baptized. It is not that we don't know anything about Baptism. Holy Scripture teaches us much about it. It reveals to us that it involves the application of water. It is to be done in the Triune God's name.

It offers forgiveness of sins. It grants the Holy Spirit. And it frees us from the bondage to sin so that we might live for Jesus himself.

So what is not to understand? Well how is it that water and words can transfer a person from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. How is it that water and words can assure one a place in heaven and a purpose on this earth? I must admit that I do not understand. But does that stifle my belief that that all occurs. Not for a second. We need not a scientific study to show some that molecular change that takes place during baptism; we need not a test to show that the body and blood of Jesus reside in the Supper; and we need not a detailed diagram to believe that while God is one as Deuteronomy says, that he is also the three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit talked about in our text today. Our is not to understood. As Jesus said, if we can't understand earthly things like the wind, do we really think we could understand the heavenly ways in which God works his great miracles of Baptism, the Lord's Supper and the very way in which the He as the Trinity operates?

No, God has not left us in the dark. He has revealed to us exactly what we need to know about these things. We know that when we bring a child to this font he is born again and therefore able to enter the kingdom just like Jesus taught to Nicodemus. We know that when we approach this altar, Jesus' body and blood will be present for us to eat and drink. We know that our God is three persons in one Godhead. And most importantly we know the truth that Christ taught us at the end of our text, that God so loved the world that He gave his only Son to be lifted up on the cross just like the serpent which Moses raised in the desert that whosoever should believe in him would not die but would have eternal life. Once again, we probably don't understand exactly how Jesus

dieing on the cross delivered our salvation. But we hold it so dearly as revealed truth. Nicodemus surely started to understand all of this as he brought spices to embalm the crucified Lord's body on Good Friday. But I suppose it wasn't until Easter morning – or maybe later- when Nicodemus finally understood how the dead man he had helped carry off the cross could deliver the new birth he needed. Well, maybe understood was an overstatement. But surely when he heard the news on that Easter day, he believed that all he had learned under the cover of darkness was absolutely true despite his lack of understanding.

This year, I will still ask the confirmands to memorize the parts of the catechism. I will still ask you to confess your belief in the real presence of Christ in the Supper in many ways. And today we took the time to recite the Athanasian Creed which teaches about the Trinity. Why? Because that which God has revealed to us is our very life. I don't expect you to understand the heavenly ways in which God works all of these things. Simply, I exhort you today, "Listen to God, and believe his word." This I will seek to do as your pastor every day. I will teach and preach to you the things revealed to us by God and at the same time confess that God's ways are higher than ours, and that I will never fully understand how it all works.

Today we must confess: We don't understand Baptism. We don't understand the Lord's Supper. And most of all, on this Trinity Sunday, We must admit that we do not understand the Trinity. But we believe in them because God has revealed that they are true.

Amen.