

Sermon on John 3, 12, Trinity, 11.06.2006

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Dear Congregation,

We all know it: these days, everything revolves around soccer. The opening match of the world soccer championships was on Friday, which take place in Germany this time. Until July 9th, the teams compete against each other and hope to hold the much coveted trophy in their hands.

For some this is not only a game, but rather a religion. People from all over the world have come to Germany to attend these games. Hundreds of millions of people will follow these events on television feverishly in hopes for their teams.

What actually is the fascination of soccer? For me it is more the fact that I myself do not have to run after the ball for 90 minutes. Certainly, it has something to do not knowing how it will end, and surprises are always possible.

But, of course, I am not here this morning to talk about soccer, but about faith. Today is “Trinity” Sunday, and my task is to make you realize, why we believe in a God of whom we say that he is the Three in One God.

Jesus says the following sentence in a conversation with the Pharisee Nicodemus”

“If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

In all that I attempt to explain, there remains a boundary, indeed, between that, which we can explain, and that, which is still God, beyond everything.

In a story which I have told this morning on radio, Augustin walks along the shore. A voice tells him to pick up a shell. And then the voice says: “And now fill the entire ocean into this shell.” To which Augustin replies, of course: “That is really not possible, how can the entire ocean fit into this small shell?” – The voice says: “It is the same with God, the human spirit is incapable of grasping the inexhaustible greatness of God.”

However, I still want to attempt to fill a little of the ocean into our mind, and to this purpose I want us to picture a soccer field for a moment, when I ask you now to imagine what would happen if there were 22 players on the field, but no ball. Or, if it were determined beforehand who should win, and all play accordingly and the audience already knew the end result. Would anyone still watch soccer? – Certainly not! If everything is fixed and set down before, why should one then watch at all?

Now we have almost come to our topic, for many people think about faith as one would think about a soccer match without a ball or with a predetermined outcome: Where is the appeal of the game? What is the appeal to believe in God?

Many think, too, that they know everything about faith already, know the outcome, that faith is something that does not offer any more surprises. “I know this already”, they think, and that is also the reason why we do not celebrate our church services with 20,000 participants. The cause is not always that it is boring per se, but that many people regard faith as being boring.

Today we have a topic which rejects this evaluation. Do we really know everything already, do we know God, can we say, o, I have heard all this once before, there is nothing that is new?

Today we talk about the Three in One God, God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit. And if you all have paid attention, you have noticed that we just baptized Nicholas in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

I do not know how you imagine it, but to stay within the picture, it would be as if the soccer match was not played with one, but with three balls at the same time. Most people have some kind of concept of God. But mostly, they think of only one person, that is God. Jesus is also still okay, because, after all, in Christian faith we count on Jesus having lived and having something to do with God. Jesus as God's Son still appears to be acceptable, because Jesus had a special relationship with God and was able to preach to people in a particular way. Furthermore, there are the circumstances of his resurrection from the dead, which point to more than the fact that Jesus was just a nice fellow.

As soon as a conversation turns to the Holy Spirit, and as soon as one tries to make people understand that our faith is proceeding on the assumption that $1+1+1=1$, even the most habitual church-goers have problems. How is this to be understood, and what kind of sense does it make? Why is this something particular which makes faith interesting and, so to speak, brings the ball back into the playing field?

What is Trinity?

Here is an example: You see, my wife is my wife for me, for my children she is their mother and for my sister-in-law she is a sister. These are three different roles which my wife assumes, at least from the perspective of three different people, and still, she is one and the same person. In regards to God, I think, this is similar: He is always the same God, who appears in three different relations to people. He is the Father who cares for us as for his own children. God is the Son, who became our brother in Jesus. And he is the Holy Spirit, which means nothing but God can be close to us everywhere and he reaches us with his energy and his comfort.

Three persons, and yet "only" the one God.

Why does this make faith interesting?

Trinity means nothing else but God is greater than we can actually imagine in all detail. That, however, also means that God has always the opportunity, no matter what happens in our life, to react to us and to work in our life, be that as Father, who is at our side with word and deed, be it as the Son, who truly reveals to us faith and helps us to understand the Father better. Be it the Holy Spirit, through whom God takes us into his arms and assures us that he is walking by our side.

I admit that this is somewhat like a 10,000-piece puzzle, where it is difficult in the beginning to sort the pieces, but in the end, everything fits together.

I have heard a nice story about a father and his 6-year old son. The son was bored on Sunday afternoon, but the father wanted peace and quiet. So the father cut a world map, which he had found in the newspaper, into many small scraps. He said to his son: Now, try and see if you can put this together again. – The father had assumed, of course, that the son would be occupied for at least an hour. But after a short while, the son came to the father and said: "I am finished." – The father couldn't believe it, but went to the table with his son, where the world map lay neatly put together. The father asked his

son: “How did you do this so quickly?” – “Well, said the son, on the other side was the head of a man. When I had put him together correctly, the world was also in order.”

Our world can be in order, as long as we understand God correctly. And I think that a statement from Dietrich Bonhoeffer can help us here this morning, who said that the teachings of Trinity are not meant to be an explanation of faith, but to keep open the secrets of the living God. This God is truly only one, but this God is also the absolute love. - And therefore, God is as Father, Son and Holy Spirit a threefold declaration of love towards us.

No matter, how exciting soccer is – this you can hear in no stadium of the world, but only at church. Amen.

And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, may keep our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.