

Trinity Sunday: June 12, 2022  
+ Titus 3:4-7 +  
“The Trinity Recreates Reality”

**Titus 3:4–7 (NKJV)** *But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared,<sup>5</sup> not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,<sup>6</sup> whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,<sup>7</sup> that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

When I was young I felt like I didn't have many redheaded guys who were celebrities to kind of look up to. But I always thought, look at Conan O'Brien, he's a famous comedian, rocking the red hair and all that—the pinnacle of what redheaded folk can achieve. But the funny thing is that a friend who is up on things more than me told me about a podcast he had heard from Conan, and there was an episode of a show Conan had been watching where it said the inner thoughts of the main character in a day where he was just super negative about everything he did. The character kept calling himself stupid and was depressed about everything he did and all that. And the thing is that Conan felt like he had that sort of negative self-talk in his life every day and he sort of thought that he was about the only one. Then with that episode, he's like wow, more people are maybe going through that. When a friend was talking to me about this, we realized, if Conan the height of celebrity red-headedness feels that way, I certainly felt like I've had my share of negative self-talk, maybe others do too and maybe that's a conversation that needs to be explored, because it has implications for how we think we are justified. So I hope today, you walk away from this text, seeing how it addresses and helps with the challenge of negative self-talk. I bring up this specific issue with the lesson for today because it is a concrete thing that falls under the umbrella of the more abstract things in the text, as I hope we'll see. With it being Trinity Sunday we'll see how the three persons of the Trinity have their role in solving this challenge too.

So now it seems to me that when we fall into negative self-talk, it actually shows how my works and my evaluation of those works are really in the driver's seat. Now if we've been doing the Lutheran thing a while, we maybe are like, yeah, I know I'm saved by grace not by works. But I would suggest that in our day-to-day life that's not as easy as it seems at first glance. We have fallen flesh and blood, and it's not so hard to be reminded of our shortcomings. We're surrounded by our works, and we're surrounded by others who maybe seem better from our limited viewpoint. In our heart of hearts, we know we're not always as nice as we project, we know we get upset at others easily, or say things we really shouldn't. Maybe negative self-talk is simply an intuition that if we think poorly about someone else, just maybe other people think poorly of us, and maybe for good reason.

Now I've been talking about the struggle of negative self-talk whether it's an everyday thing or a having a bad day thing because when our text talks about us being saved “not by works of righteousness which we have done,” it is otherwise easy to be like, oh yeah, I know that or that's only an otherworldly thing and not about my everyday life. Every day we're confronted with our own works and our own doubts and self-talk about them, and that can be a horrifying prison and reality we create for ourselves, especially when

spiraling in it. But now our text ungrounds us from that reality and says your reality is not created by your works. Instead, our God, the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit create a new reality for us. We see that recreation language in our text for today when it says we're saved and fixed by this "washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit." Terms like regeneration and renewing are talking about having new life which for us now means that the Holy Spirit creates and determines our reality. Part of that is how he frees us from our sins and how they can paralyze us with negative self-talk and self-esteem. The washing is talking about baptism, since in the Book of Acts, chapter 22, baptism is connected with *washing* away sins. So with baptism we have a new, forgiven reality, where sins are gone and the negative prisons we create for ourselves are broken open.

Moving from the Third to the Second Person of the Trinity, this washing creates such a new reality for us because, as our lesson says, the Holy Spirit has been "poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior." We are washed from our sins because Jesus has paid for and taken care of those sins for us. He did it with his perfect life that covers over all our negativity; he did it also with his cross that defeated and crushed everything we could have to feel negative about with our sins. We are resurrected with a new reality now as we have faith worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, and we will have a resurrection like Jesus when we live eternally with him, even though we die someday. We are "heirs according to the hope of eternal life" as our lesson says.

That eternal life is not only something for the future, but a new reality right now. When we have our negative inclinations and self-doubt and feel depressed about things, God's talk, his Word, is certainly more powerful than our negative self-talk. I hope when you feel negative self-talk, this or others from God's Word can swoop in and help push that away with your true reality in Christ. When others are down, I hope you can help them with this gospel too. Lend your voice to help the self-talk when others are down. Maybe we have avenues for evangelism here too. God's talk is better and fills us in when our self-talk brings us down.

Now we can circle back to the start of the lesson, going from the Second to the First Person of the Trinity, where it says "when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared." The term God our Savior there is distinct from Jesus and the Holy Spirit in this text, so we know it's talking about the Father. In the original language of the New Testament, Greek, the term used in that verse for his "love toward man" is the same English word we use for philanthropy. God the Father is the true philanthropist by appearing and sending Christ to us. When we bear in mind God's philanthropy, we understand what is really in the driver's seat of our lives: it's not our works, it's God's love. So all I've said about negative self-talk is really just a concretization of the broader reality that we can now live in peace each day as we know our mess-ups don't make our reality, they don't define us, instead we ground ourselves in God's philanthropy, his love that he gives us for free, his love that cause Christ to come, his love that sent the Holy Spirit to create faith in our hearts through Baptism and the Word. So Trinity Sunday is not only a celebration of our somewhat limited understanding of who God is as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as revealed by Scripture, but it is also a celebration of all he has done for us.

In the end, I hope we've seen that the Trinity creates a better reality for us than we tend to try to create for ourselves. Negativity with ourselves is not something I'm going to pretend to fix perfectly in one little sermon. But the gospel is a continual thing for us, a constant help that we turn to. So I hope we realize when the Holy Spirit washes and regenerates, it means he creates a new reality for us that breaks down and frees us from the negative realities we can harmfully create for ourselves. God's talk in his Word is bigger than all our negative self-talk or self-perception. With no works to show for ourselves, he loved us, saved us, and made us heirs of heaven. So let's keep looking to his talk to flood our thoughts and hearts. Amen.