

# NAME DAY

'Name Day'

The Holy Trinity  
8:30 & 10:45 am, May 22, 2016  
The Reverend Nancy R. Easton  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

[Psalm 8](#); [Romans 5:1-5](#); [John 16:12-15](#)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ....oh, and the Holy Spirit, too. AMEN.

The name of the church in which I was raised is known as "First Lutheran Church." I don't believe that was its original name. It was founded by German immigrants, so I'm thinking folks initially referred to it as the German Lutheran Church. But somewhere along the way, it became First Lutheran. Perhaps that occurred when Swedish immigrants decided to start another Lutheran congregation two blocks down the street. I suppose my church wanted to claim they were the first Lutherans in the town—a somewhat unattractive competitive spirit, a bit of territorialism, if you ask me. The Swedish Lutherans, however, apparently refused to call themselves "Second Lutheran Church" and instead embraced the name "Bethlehem Lutheran Church." (Perhaps this was their own competitiveness: "We got Jesus from Day One—the town in which he was born!") At any rate, to this day, there are still two Lutheran congregations in my hometown: First Lutheran and Bethlehem Lutheran. And, to some degree, still competing.

My internship congregation, which I served in my 3<sup>rd</sup> year of seminary education, is called "Lake Lutheran Church." It's located in the town of Conneaut Lake, which is named after the Lake on whose shores the town resides. Makes sense. Only you can't see the Lake from Lake Lutheran Church—not even from the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor windows of the apartment above the sanctuary, where I lived. The church building is at least seven blocks away from the shore of the Lake. Uh....truth in advertising?

When I was ordained in 1987, I was called to serve a congregation in Duncannon, Perry County, known as "Christ Lutheran Church." Now, THAT name makes perfect sense—the very name of the one we profess. No problem with that name. The difficulty is where it is located—on Church Street. You wouldn't think that a big deal, but Christ Lutheran Church is the only church on Church Street. All the other churches: Duncannon Presbyterian, Asbury United Methodist, United Church of Christ, Duncannon Assembly of God, and Saint Bernadette Roman Catholic Church are all located—naturally—on North High Street. Go figure.

The names of churches and even the streets on which they are located can make us wonder what was in the minds of the first parishioners, and whether the names are appropriate or meaningful. For example, here we are, you and I, worshiping in this community called "Trinity Lutheran Church." Which could be a most wonderful name for our fellowship, if it weren't for one small detail. Most of us, pastors included, struggle to give definition to the term "trinity." Having to articulate this ancient church doctrine, and

render a clear understanding of what “God in three persons” actually means remains the bane of a seminary student’s existence. I just knew, when I sat before my candidacy committee in 1987, and they quizzed me on church doctrine, that I would be asked to explain the Holy Trinity. I probably was sweating bullets as I worried about it, too. Actually, I was saved from answering that question. Instead, I had the joy of answering this question: “How would you explain the real presence of Jesus Christ—the body and blood of our Lord—in the meal of Holy Communion to a 5 year old?” (Note to self: Be careful what you wish for.)

A fellow seminarian, also undergoing the grilling of our candidacy committee, **was** asked about the Trinity. She responded with seven words: The Trinity is what the Trinity does.

Okay, well maybe she explicated it a little further than that, but the truth is she gave a good answer from which to start. The Trinity is what the Trinity does. And what the Trinity does is this: The Trinity is how God lives out God’s self in a mutually-loving relationship for the sake of creation: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And the Trinity is how God has chosen to communicate his holy purpose to us. We’ve got these bits and pieces of scripture, like today’s passage from the gospel of John, that attempt to describe this relationship within God’s self, and we’ve decided to put a name to it. The Church has named it the Trinity. Whether that is an entirely accurate description of God or not is not the issue. The point is, scripture and the Church through the centuries have pretty consistently pointed us in the direction of this God who seems to have revealed himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And however those three persons interact with one another impacts our lives, and becomes the invitation to us to join with them in a mutually-loving relationship for the sake of creation.

Jesus takes great pains to tell his disciples about this “God relationship” of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit before he leaves them to go and die on the cross. That’s what we’re reading in John’s gospel in those chapters of 14, 15, 16, and 17. Jesus first makes clear that everything he has been saying, teaching, and doing aligns with the holy purpose of his Father in heaven. Jesus describes how he and the Father are one—in mind and mission and power. He continually tells his closest followers that the Father and Jesus himself talk with one another all the time—in prayer—and Jesus encourages the disciples to do the same. And then Jesus goes on to say that after he has left them, the Spirit will come to be with them. The Advocate, he calls this Spirit. This Advocate will speak the truth, the same truth that Jesus has been speaking all along. It is the truth about the holy purpose of God. It is the truth about what it means to follow this God in the way of Jesus. And because the Spirit will speak that truth, Jesus wants his friends to trust in that Spirit, trust in the words it will speak, the encouragement it will bring, and the guidance it will deliver.

Bring it forward 2,000 years, and here we are, bearing that name—Trinity. I’ve come to the conclusion it is a most appropriate and wonderful name to bear. Because we are still listening to and relying upon our Advocate, that Spirit of Jesus who helps us remember not only what Jesus taught so long ago, but also what God still dreams for us and our world today.

Jesus says something very interesting in this snippet of scripture from John. He says, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” And then Jesus goes on to say the Spirit, the Advocate will fill in the gaps, so to speak, bringing to Jesus’

followers all that he wanted to say. Which means you and I have every reason to continue listening, and continue listening well for the Spirit here in our time, in our midst. For there is every possibility we will be given new revelations, taught new ways to share God's love, guided onto new paths where we respond to a chaotic and dark world with God's life and light.

It's our name day. The Trinity is what the Trinity does. And if we are Trinity, then I think you and I **know** what we are to do—for the sake of creation and for the glory of God.

**AMEN.**

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