

**Victory of the Lamb, Franklin, Wisconsin
Trinity Sunday, May 27, 2018**

Finishing and Furnishing: Love Yourself

Psalm 139:13-16; Isaiah 6:1-8; Romans 8:1-4,14-17

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My twin two-year-old grandsons love graham crackers. But not just any graham cracker. They only love perfect graham crackers. If you drop a package and the pieces get broke, forget it. They aren't interested.

I could say they are too picky. But I think they got that from their grandpa.

I only want perfect pieces too.

For example, when I plan a vacation and things don't work out as I planned, there is a very strong temptation to say the whole day is ruined. It isn't perfect.

Or if I'm doing some task and it isn't as good as I think it should be, if it is not "perfect" in my sight, I'm tempted to dismiss it all as worthless.

I only want perfect pieces too.

Now if my grandsons and I were the only perfectionists in the world, I wouldn't say anything. But I'm guessing there are quite a few of us here.

When we look at ourselves in the mirror, we don't see the "perfect graham cracker" and we have a hard time loving ourselves.

I saw it someone else, and then recognized it in myself. When I was in Missouri there was a woman who was hypercritical of everyone and everything. At first I thought she felt she was better than anyone else. But as I got to know her better, I realized that she didn't see herself as the perfect graham cracker, and so she tried to break up everyone else's graham cracker to make herself feel better.

This is one of side of the story when we consider our Savior's command to "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you hate yourself, it is really hard to love anyone else.

The other side of the spectrum are those people who truly do see themselves as superior. They are filled with pride because they are one of the "beautiful" people, the successful people. They are better than others. They are the perfect graham cracker... at least in their sight.

But this is a sick kind of self-love that also leads us to judge others like the Pharisee in Jesus' story of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector: "God, I thank you that I am not like other people—

robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get” (Luke 18:11-12). Where is that happy medium, that middle ground that allows us to see ourselves as we really are and still love ourselves?

I believe the way to that middle ground is found in the three persons of our Triune God. Today, in liturgical churches all over the world, this day is observed as Trinity Sunday. Just like Memorial Day is a day to look back and honor the sacrifice and service of the past, Trinity Sunday is like that. It comes right at the end of the festival half of the church year and gives us a chance to pause and look back at what our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit has done for us. When we do that, we are brought back into the godly middle ground between despair and arrogance. It gives us the true answer to the question, “Why should I love myself?”

We think first of the Father. Why love myself? Because I am made just as the Father determined.

NEXT SLIDE – Psalm 139:13-15

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

Let’s do a little English grammar work! “I am made.” Is that a passive or active verb? Ok, who likes grammar? But the point is that you didn’t make yourself. You are the passive participant. Someone made you.

That means we have no reason to take pride in ourselves and look down on others. I am made by the Almighty Creator just like everyone else. I didn’t make my looks or my health or my abilities.

That also means that I have no reason to condemn myself as an imperfect graham cracker, and therefore not worthy of any consideration. To look at yourself in disgust is to look at what God has made and be disgusted with God. “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” God has made us as he determined.

Not only did he create us, he planned out our lives.

NEXT SLIDE – Psalm 139:16-18

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!
¹⁸ Were I to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand—
when I awake, I am still with you.

When I am struggling because my life isn't going the way that I had planned, when I see my life as a broken graham cracker, God, help me to step back and see that this is all according to your plan. When I feel like I am lost, "I awake, I am still with you." God isn't going to forsake me.

On the other side, if I think "Everything is going according to my plan," and I think too highly of myself, then I need to remember that this too is a gift from God.

Which leads into the work of the Second Person of the Trinity.

NEXT SLIDE – A PORTION OF ISAIAH 6

In John 12, John writes that Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and spoke of him (John 12:41). Isaiah sees Jesus when he sees the glory of the LORD in Isaiah 6.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory."

⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

⁵ "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty."

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

What was Isaiah's reaction in the presence of God? It is similar to Job when he says, "I despise myself in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). He didn't love himself. He despised himself. The holiness of God exposed his unholiness.

This is both the blessing and curse of Lutheranism. We joke about Lutheran guilt but there is so much truth to it. Sunday after Sunday we step here into God's presence and confess our sins. I am by nature sinful and deserve God's wrath and punishment.

But I am afraid we leave ourselves there. We confess that we see ourselves as broken, imperfect graham crackers... and that there is nothing we can do about it.

That understanding is critical if we are to love ourselves. Otherwise we will love ourselves for our own goodness, we will base our worth on our own self-esteem, which is a very weak foundation for life.

But God didn't want Isaiah to stay in that darkness. Nor did he want him to step into a place of pride and say, "Hey, look at me, God is calling me to be a prophet!"

He brought Isaiah back to this place where he could love himself... He was a man of unclean lips, but that sin was atoned or paid for.

Our second lesson explains that great exchange.

NEXT SLIDE – Romans 8:1-4

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:1-4).

The law, the ten commandments, can't help us love ourselves. It only condemns us. But Jesus came in the likeness of sinful flesh. He became like us in every way except our sin. And then he became a sin offering.

What does that mean? When you and I see the brokenness of our lives and despise what we have done or not done, when are filled with shame and self-loathing, then step up and place your hand on Jesus and confess your sin upon the sin offering so that he might die for you.

What does that mean? Then the righteous requirements of the law are fully met in us. Then we are that perfect graham cracker that we all wish we could be. That is the way God sees us.

Then as God's forgiven children, we are in a position to deal with the fact that our lives are broken, that often we don't see ourselves the way we would like, that we suffer. That's ok, because it is that suffering that makes us certain that we are heirs with Christ.

NEXT SLIDE – Romans 8:14-17

¹⁴For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "*Abba*, Father."

¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷Now if we are

children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory (Romans 8:14-17).

What does this passage say? Our natural way to live life is to be afraid that something is going to crush us. And there are many things that can crush us. In the St. Paul's cemetery are the graves of two brothers, Benjamin and William Horn. They died within months of each other in 1945, one in Luxembourg and the other in Italy. How can that not crush you?

Perhaps some of you may know Cameron Nahf and his brother, students at Shoreland Lutheran High School, and their horrible car crash this week. How can you go on when you feel crushed by that kind of loss?

We have received the gift of the Spirit that enables us to cry out, "Abba, Father." We don't understand, but we claim you as our Father. The Nahf brothers. The Horn brothers. They were God's children. They were and are co-heirs with God. They have shared in Christ's suffering, and now three of them share in his glory.

This is our hope and confidence.

LAST SLIDE – Blank or Series Logo

There is a book entitled, *When Children Became People*. It traces the effects of the Christian faith on the Roman empire and that culture's understanding of children. When the Christian faith permeates a society, people love themselves in the proper way so that they can love others, including the weak and the oppressed.

Dear friends, on this Trinity Sunday, let's remember what makes us loveable.

It isn't that we are the perfect graham cracker. It is because God has made us and planned out our life. You are of great worth because the Creator of the universe has made you. You are the perfect graham cracker in his sight because he made you and you are not a mistake.

Remember what makes us loveable.

It isn't that we are the perfect graham cracker, having done everything right. It is because the God who loved us has taken our guilt upon himself. He sees us as the perfect graham cracker because we are completely forgiven.

Remember what makes us loveable.

It isn't that our lives fall into place perfectly. It is because we are God's children and the crushing effects of this fallen and broken world make us appreciate that there is an eternity of perfection awaiting us.

And when we love ourselves in this way, we will fulfill God's purpose for us. It is this understanding of ourselves that results in us loving the LORD our God with all our heart and soul and mind and loving our neighbor as ourselves. Amen.