

John 16:12-15

Holy Trinity

June 14, 1992

*12 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.*

I remember a springtime morning, being awakened with a shaking and a shouting, The sheep are out.

I leaped out of bed, threw on my jeans, flew down the stairs and toward the door, quizzing my mother as I went by her, "Where are they?" Just as I reached the door I heard her reply, "April Fool."

She got me with that one, she knew she would for we lived on the corner of Rt. 250 and Huron Avery Road. The traffic was heavy; sheep on the road could mean injury or death for them, or for those in the car that struck them.

Or the sheep could wander into flowers or garden, ruin what was there, eat something harmful to them, get sick.

Apart from all danger I knew from experience that once they got out they would be very stubborn about going back where they were safe. The further they moved from where they belonged, the more trouble they would be for me.

That's why we kept the fences maintained, the gates closed, that the sheep would be safe, feed on what was for their good, not cause trouble in their wandering.

In a very real way, the creeds and confessions of the church are like a fence. They serve as an outer limit.

Creeds were constructed in times when the sheep wanted to wander in all sorts of directions. On lamb named Marcion said that the creator God and the one Jesus called Father were different. He got this idea when he read in the Old Testament about the God of wrath, who commanded all the enemies be destroyed, and read in the New Testament that Jesus commanded us to pray for our enemies, bless those who persecute us. How can this be the same God?

They are not the same God, decided Marcion. The creator is a lesser god, not the almighty God who is Father of Jesus.

In time the church constructed the fence called the Apostles' Creed. I believe in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord. With these words the sheep were kept from grazing where Marcion had fed.

Others said, Jesus looked human, but was not really human. Born of the Virgin Mary the church answered in Creed.

Still others said, Jesus is God, but not the highest God, rather a lesser God, a being created by God.

The Nicene Creed pushed that space outside the pasture with the words, God of God, light of light, True God of True God, begotten not made, one being with the Father by whom all things were made.

In time a third creed was constructed, a new fence, called the Athanasian Creed. *We worship one God in trinity and the Trinity in unity, neither confusing the persons nor dividing the divine being. The Father is one person, the Son is another, and the Spirit is still another. But the deity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one, equal in glory, coeternal in majesty.*

With each new creed, even each new word came a change in the fence = a different limit.

Add to those creeds all the Lutheran confessions, the Small and Large Catechisms, the Augsburg Confession, the Formula of Concord, the Smalcald Articles. All are part of a fence, adjusted, moved, added to, subtracted from, always setting the limits for the sheep's grazing.

All the while in every part of the pasture, sheep are slipping through the fence. Sometimes one by one as this one will say I don't believe Jesus was really God, or that one will say I don't believe in the resurrection of the body, only in souls being saved.

Sometimes whole groups will break down a portion of fence, like Jehovah's witnesses believing that Jesus is a created being, not one with the Father or Unitarians rejecting the Trinity.

And always the church as a whole is adjusting the fences. Just like it was on our farm, where the sheep could graze one year, they could not in a later year, and where they once were forbidden now they could graze.

How can such change be in the church of Christ? Hear our gospel for today.

Jesus said to his disciples: "I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak

on his own, but will speak whatever he hears and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”

Jesus did not tell his disciples everything, but the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth would declare to the disciples, to the church what Jesus wanted taught.

The Holy Spirit continues to teach the truth in the church. Christ gives us new understanding as we are able to bear them. As we change, as the world changes, Christ continues to speak with a living voice through the Spirit.

So it was in the fourth century A.D. that the church confessed we worship one God in Trinity and the Trinity in unity.

So it is in the year 1992 that the church of Christ struggles to understand how we should talk about the Trinity in an age of the equality of the sexes. None of us believe God is male, Jesus in his humanity was. How can we talk about God today to recognize that women as well as men are created in God's image? That fence is being built right now; it may take decades or even centuries to build it.

But Jesus promise to us all is that through the Holy Spirit he will guide us into all the truth. He will keep us in his pasture; he will be our Shepherd until we come to his eternal pasture.

This is the one thing that matters: that we sheep not wander off into destruction, but that we be kept in our Lord's care. Christ is the Way and the Truth and the Life, in him and in him alone there is salvation. The Lord keep you in Christ now and forever.