In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. At the beginning of each service, I stand before you after we have just finished singing our first hymn, and I state, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” To which you respond, “Amen.” It means that the band is tuned, the warm up is over, now it’s time to get down to business. It’s not unlike the national anthem or a coin toss at a sporting event. It’s like when you arrive at your hunting spot or your fishing hole. It’s like when you go from talking about doing something to actually doing it. In our context the pastor is invoking the name of the trinity in order to conduct our worship in His name. It is to remind us, that just before we confess our sins, we are worshipping the almighty God. It is also a reminder to us of our baptisms. After all, when we are baptized, we have the name of the Holy Trinity invoked upon us when we have the water combined with God’s Word. By beginning our worship by calling upon this same name, we are worshipping the God who has called us his own and we are recognizing that fact. We not only do it at the beginning of our service but we do it all throughout our service. After all, our sins are forgiven in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the majority of our prayers end by calling upon all three persons in the trinity. We speak a confession, today a rather long, exhaustive confession, that recognizes the work that all three persons in the trinity do for us. Not only that, but these confessions lay out the direct role of each Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in our own history and doctrine. Even such things as hearing the scripture readings, listening to a sermon, and receiving communion are things that all three persons in the trinity take part in.

After all, when we hear scripture we hear the stories that our God and Jesus took part in as active participants, and while we hear those stories, the Holy Spirit works in us so that we may better understand these stories. Take our readings for today as examples. Our Old Testament lesson centers around a vision, and a terrifying vision at that. Imagine that one Sunday, right after you’ve received your bulletin and sat down, that the vision of this altar and cross would be replaced by the very throne of God. Because that is basically what happens to Isaiah. Would you even know what you were looking at? Would you have any idea what those six-winged creatures were? Or would you just be terrified? Yet what is it that we see in this vision? Who are the characters? First there is God, kingly and mighty and sat upon his throne. Then there is Isaiah, a man, a sinner. Then there are the seraphim, the six-winged creatures that proclaim the glory of the Lord. What does this story teach us about these characters? Well it teaches us that Isaiah was chosen by God to have this vision, but yet it also shows us a microcosm of the relationship that God has with His people. You see Isaiah, by the fact that he is a human, is a sinner, and he recognizes that fact. God destroys that which is unclean, and Isaiah recognizes that as well. Isaiah realizes that the presence of God is not a place he is worthy to be. So, God, through the actions of the seraphim, cleanses Isaiah and takes his sin away. Anyone who tells you that the God of the Old Testament is simply a God of destruction, let this be yet another example against that. You see God has every means, opportunity, and justification to bring Isaiah to judgement. Yet he has plans for him. He has work for Isaiah to do. So as part of his mercy, he forgives Isaiah and gives him a task. He often does the same for us. He is constantly taking our guilt away as Jesus has atoned for our sins. God is constantly using us sinners to accomplish his will. To some he gives big, monumental tasks. To others he gives smaller, more mundane tasks. Yet all are important for the accomplishment of God’s will and the furthering of his Gospel. All of this he does, as Martin Luther says, out of Fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in us. Yet this does not stop us from disdaining the tasks that he has set before us. It does not stop us from rejecting His gifts.

For example, tomorrow we celebrate Memorial Day. Memorial Day is one that should bring us, in this country at least, a greater appreciation for the gifts that God has blessed our nation with. One of those wonderful gifts has been no shortage of men and women willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for the good of our land and the people in it. When I think about it, I give thanks that I was born when I was born. There has never been the fear of a draft to contend with. My generation has no great war and that is something to be thankful for. Yet instead, this gift of service, much like marriage, babies, sexuality, even our own relationship with God, is abused and underappreciated. That should cause us great pain, to see the gifts of God misused. And one of the most misused gifts of God is his name. God’s name is invoked across all manner of media and across all manner of situations in the real world. In fact, this was something that God was not in favor of, as the second commandment states, “Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God.” One of the things that has always stuck with me since confirmation was a discussion we had about this in class. Pastor Hardy taught us that when we invoke the name of God he is listening, even if that means we are swearing damnation upon someone or something. God’s name is not something to be thrown around with lack of care, and it’s not something that we should take lightly. That has always been in my mind, even when I myself have broken this commandment. I remember a time when on TV you would never hear name of God or any action attributed to it. But now it seems those times have changed. The problem is that the name of God is a wonderful gift. To know the three persons of the trinity is a fantastic thing. You know one of the things that you are constantly hearing from politicians is how transparent they are going to be. We even have laws on the books in order to make things as transparent as possible, so that we can see what those in authority over us are doing and we can make sure that they are not abusing their power. Well my friends our God has laid all his works bare for us. Our God has revealed himself to us, through the three persons of our trinity. What a comfort it is for us to know who our God is! We are not stuck on some spiritual quest, searching for truth. Our God has shown us the truth. He has revealed it through Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Through this name, God has revealed that it is not his will to simply have dominion over the earth and humanity, God does not wish to oppress us. Instead through his name, God reveals to us that he wishes to free us. He wishes to free us from our bondage in sin, the Father who created the world, only to see his perfection become undone, has sent his Son to free us. The Son, who was perfection incarnate only to see his perfection become mocked, has given his life to free us, and risen again to free us once more. The Holy Spirit, who has revealed these truths to us, only to have us doubt and ignore him, stays and sustains our faith, even when we don’t want it to. It is through this divine name, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that we are brought into God’s fold and seen as his child. It is through this name that God has revealed his work on behalf of humanity. It is in this name that sin and death were defeated for us, and it is in this name, that we, imperfect sinners though we be, claim that victory and receive our reward of everlasting life in the presence of God. Amen. Now may the peace of God which surpasses our understanding keep and guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus now and forever. Amen.