

**Sermon: Shame, Pride, Glory**  
**Scripture: Proverbs 8, Matthew 28**  
**Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans**  
**Date: May 31, 2026**

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“And surely I am with you always til the end of the age.” That’s how the Gospel of Matthew ends his account of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. And what we call today - Trinity Sunday - is a kind of culmination of a liturgical cycle of the church that I want to trace out for you for a moment cause it frames the year differently from our secular calendar. So it all began on Nov 30, 2025 at the start of Advent when we began preparing for what was to come, for who was to come which was God in the form of a baby which we celebrated with the feast of Christmas and then there were the 12 days of Christmas which culminated in Epiphany this revealing more fully of who Jesus was which cam I might add by way of foreigners from a strange land, the Magi, and through the weeks of epiphany we had scriptures that continued to reveal at deeper and deeper levels who this babe, this son, this person Jesus really was, i.e. the Holy One of God, the Christ and at just about the moment when we’ve come alongside Jesus as the Great teacher and healer, he’s transfigured and glorified on the mountaintop and then boom Lent arrived, February 18, 2026, on Ash Wednesday and suddenly there’s talk about ashes and death and the stripping away of all that glory as the scriptures moved us toward his impending suffering and death. He is scapegoated by the religious leaders and the civic authorities and the people go along as we witness his murder and his death on Good Friday followed thankfully gloriously by his resurrection on Easter, April 5th this year. Then our scriptures take us

through the 40 days of his resurrection appearances before his Ascension and 10 days later Pentecost which we celebrated last Sunday when the Holy Spirit comes down and infuses the people and births the church, that's where the body went. And it is from that narrative we receive the notion of God as one yes but also 3 somehow, that God is Father Above and God is Son among us and God is also manifest as Spirit within us and around us which brings us to today, Trinity Sunday. That's the essential story, that's what it's all about.

But there are two things I'd ask you to notice. First of all the direction of the narrative is always down and toward us. The direction is not necessarily literal - up there coming down here - but critical in what it suggests. God comes down and to us, as deep and as low, in fact, as God could possibly go - as a baby in the womb and in a cow stall, and then as Jewish peasant who grows up and has no home to call his own (remember his own family thought he was a bit mad), and then as criminal on the cross and a dead body in the tomb. Right? And those aren't mere lowly social stations, they are, in point of fact, places of SHAME - Mary, pregnant outside marriage, shame. Jesus born impoverished in the barn of another, shame. Homeless and in need of others charity, shame. Despised by many and called heretic by respected religious leaders, shame. Hung naked as a criminal on a cross - the law of Moses was specific about that one: "a person executed for a capital crime and hung on a tree or a pole is under God's curse." It's shame in nakedness, shame in rejection by the world, shame in rejection by God, shame, shame shame! It's all as low as you could possibly go and it is how we say God comes to us in the humblest possible of ways so that even the least of us and maybe especially the

least of us, those of us ashamed and living in shame especially have Jesus with us.

And the second thing I'd ask you to notice about the narrative that we have just walked through liturgically over the last half-year is the center fulcrum point at the top of the arc, I would suggest with the guidance of the anthropologist Renee Girard and his theological students James Alison and Gil Bailie among others, is not the resurrection actually, because even the resurrection references the central moment of all the gospels, which is what? It's this: the human project of culture building and group-identity forming and self-justifying righteousness-claiming that comes by way of scapegoating the other. That is this deep-rooted, original, you might say, sin at the heart of humanity, that God's Jesus project, you might say is seeking to address, how we humans so often, too often, seek to establish and justify and identify ourselves at the expense of the enemy.

Renee Girard makes the case that it is as deep and ancient as the sacrificial system of human culture from time immemorial and as immediate to us in how we bind ourselves to others and to our in-groups by gossiping or speaking badly about someone else. What better and more efficient way to feel a connection with another or know myself as part of the in-group than to share together our distaste of another. We are bound and at peace and like one another in our mutual hatred of Trump or his MAGA followers... or we are bound to one another and at peace and like each other because of our shared hatred of the coastal elite snowflake libs. This in-group forming at the expense of the other is the fundamental human dynamic that killed Jesus. The chief priest Caiaphas named it clearly "It is better for one man to die than for the nation to perish". It's when our good we decide or enact comes at the expense or the sacrifice of another. That

is the essential sin revealed and uncovered in the Gospels and even now continues to have it's way with us and wreaks unknown havoc. And the sad thing is that even we Christians, followers of our scapegoated Lord, continue to miss this point as the central one of our faith. "The lamb slain before the foundation of the world", is how Revelation describes the centrality of the sacrificial system and how Jesus' death and resurrection was the unbinding of us from it, that kept us estranged from God.

It is one of the main points that Wisdom has been calling out from the beginning for us to pay attention to, as Katherine read to us from Proverbs, "Listen to my instruction and be wise, blessed are those who listen to me for I walk the way of righteousness and justice, for those who find me, Wisdom says, find life and favor from the Lord." The Hebrew scriptures referred to Wisdom as being there with God from the beginning and the followers of Jesus would see this divine feminine as the Holy Spirit of Jesus revealed and come among us and having centrally and essentially to do with how Jesus was scapegoat to death and how his resurrection vindicated him along with those places of death and shame that is the essential downfall of humanity. So in the great commission when Jesus is sending his disciples forth and says "All authority on earth has been given to me so go forth to make disciples in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teach them to obey everything I have commanded", we understand that Jesus' authority is not control and domination over but rather through the Spirit it is the deeper and more enduring power of healing and restoration and love that situated itself in the very deepest recesses of our shame and our deaths and from there will heal and restore us and on and through us others. We will not save ourselves in any other way. Not by the greatest weapon of might nor the smartest computer on the

planet, now by eliminating finally all the enemy others nor by getting and gaining everything for ourselves to strengthen our own tribe and our in-group. That is the old human project that only and always leads to death and destruction.

And all authority has been given to Jesus through His Holy Spirit to begin creating a new world where identity is established not over and against anyone else but on the fact of our being children of a loving God who comes to us out of love for us and all of us... we magnificent humans that we are, to borrow Pope Leo's phrase from his encyclical.

Magnificent Humans, yes, but also humans in serious need of being redeemed and saved for we really really know how to hurt each other. We're really good at separating ourselves from one another and shaming the other and killing the other too. The human story is the Jesus story, revealing just how beautiful we can be and how awful we can be too. And apparently God wants us beautiful. But somehow we struggle with how to allow God to let us be beautiful and we decide we must establish our beauty and our worthiness, how? Over and against others.

The ways we do this are multitude but one I want to lift up today as we enter into the month of June which some people acknowledge as Pride month to honor LGBTQ+ folks among us is how we heterosexuals and cis-gender folks who are the majority and dominant group within our culture have scapegoated, shamed and therefore been anti-Christ to our LGBTQ+ siblings. We have too often and continue in many circles to distort God's purposes and his words by shaming and making other those who love differently and feel different in their bodies than the majority of us do. We have taken a few utterly random passages out of context in our Bibles, passages whose meaning in and of themselves are even suspect when

taking into account the cultural, linguistic and religious context, of the day, and we've decided that that somehow is the one of the most essential teaching of the Christian church, that God made us heterosexual and that homosexuality is a sinful deviation and so they, homosexuals, are the problem that undermine God's word and the family and threaten civilization itself. It's quite simple in it's terribleness. It is a textbook example of the scapegoating mechanism that Jesus came to undo in us and somehow those who are followers of Jesus, those who say that Jesus has saved them from hell are scapegoating the vulnerable others and putting them through hell.

I mean, our society has been changing and getting better on this account up til recently I's say and this movement is actually the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst undoing the human sin of scapegoating the minority other and so it's terribly ironic that the places that seem least open to stopping the scapegoating of LGBTQ+ people are in Christian churches fearful of what will become of this world if we accept such things, just like slave owners were fearful of what would happen in this world if we accepted the freedom of slaves, just like Christians were against the marrying of white and black people if we allowed such things, just like men have been scared and resistant to what will happen if we give women equal rights as well. Fear, fear, fear that leads to scapegoating the other as the problem - it's the gays and lesbians, it's the blacks, it's the women, it's the immigrants, it's whoever the next outsider group is that we can blame i order to deny our own sinfulness and through whom we can relieve our own fears by scapegoating them. It is the old old story, the seemingly neverending story.... It's what happened to Jesus and it's exactly what Jesus' Holy Spirit is undoing within and among us.

And here's the difficult thing. It cuts both ways. The victims of scapegoating, if they are to be aligned to the Spirit that is Holy, can't then turn to the perpetrators of their victimization and shame and scapegoat and punish them. That's not how this Christ thing works. That's not how Wisdom calls this out. Revenge, retaliation, pay-back, as delicious as it is, is anti-Christ. C'mon Jesus, you mean when someone has been unjust to me or someone I love, I don't get to make them suffer as much as I did?

Go back to the story.

The ultimate innocent victim, Jesus the Christ, who was killed by those who feared the unbridled love he brought returned and forgave.

I'm just telling the story. I'm explaining what Wisdom, what Jesus says... I know it's suspect for me a cis-gender, heterosexual male to remind the victims of our culture's scapegoating that the way of Jesus is the way of forgiveness, but it's true. And the only, the only way, we will be saved is if we follow Jesus' way of forgiveness and love and remove ourselves from the cycle of scapegoating, blaming and victimizing the other, whoever the other may be. We can't move from shame to pride if pride means being proud of ourselves over and against others even if those others have made us ashamed. That is playing on the same field by the same rules that the scapegoaters established.

The only field, the only rules that will save us are the ones Wisdom has established from the beginning and that Jesus manifested in his life, death and resurrection - love even to shame and death and then forgiveness. "The glory of God," as St Irenaeus said, "is the human being fully alive." So the opposite of shame is not pride but glory. Glory is the reverse of shame. Shame, as James Alison names it, "is the losing of reputation, the shunning, the accusing word, the contemptuous glance that

destroys us without actually killing us, or pushes us into doing the killing of ourselves.” p. 79 While glory is the reverse of this, “it is the fullness of a positive regard, a high reputation from another that sustains identity, makes us alive, glowing within with delight at who we are, being recognized with praise and admiration.” And this is what children of God experience from God, James Alison insists, not shame, not pride which must be stirred from within but a glory which comes from God to us because, as Alison says, God genuinely likes us. James Alison, this remarkable gay Catholic priest is often making that point that it’s a better way of framing it - that instead of God loving us is to say that God actually likes us. Can we believe that, despite our scapegoating tendencies, despite our shame, despite ourselves, that God really likes us, holds us in high esteem and high regard. Haven’t you noticed that when you receive that from others it brings out the best in you? Don’t you just want to live up and into the high regard that someone has for you? That’s the idea of the Christian faith - Jesus dies for us not because his love is greater than our depravity, but because he likes us. Jesus liked us so much he died for us.

So you see, there’s no need to try to be worthy and liked and part of the in-group at the expense of others, cause God already has declared us on the inside of his very heart. We can then respond in kind, because it’s such a beautiful thing to be liked and loved by God like that. Don’t we want that for everyone else? Isn’t that the love we long to see? Can we be the love we long to see?