

“Who is God?”
Genesis 1:1-3
Matthew 28:16-20
Brentwood First Presbyterian
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Trinity Sunday
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Introduction

A 3 year old asks his mother,
"Mom, who made the TV?"
His mom responds, "People made the TV."
After a moment, he asked, "Well who made the people?"
"God made the people" she replies.
"Daddy, come quick, look at the airplane. Who made the airplane?"
Comes the answer, "People made the airplane." Long silence. "And I suppose
God made the people, right?" "That's right." But the conversation was not
finished. "Mom, just who is this God anyway?" That is the question before us this
morning: Who is God?

Today is Trinity Sunday. It is on this occasion that ministers around the world
address themselves to this subject. The subject of the triune nature of God.

It has been said that trying to understand God is like trying to teach calculus to a
worm. Not that we are worms!

So let me begin by saying that a discussion of the triune nature of God does not
attempt to explain God. It only explains to us in a very elemental way what God
has revealed to us about God's self so far. To describe the tip of the iceberg
above the water is not to describe the entire iceberg. So we Christians affirm the
triune nature of God, not as an explanation of God, but simply as a way of
describing what we know about God.

In his book FAITH, HOPE AND HILARITY, television star Dick Van Dyke talks
about some of the humorous experiences he had during the three years he
taught Sunday School. For example, there was the boy who describes how God
creates people. "He draws us first," he said, "then cuts us out." When asked why
worshippers no longer offer burnt offerings, one boy replied, "Air pollution." In
response to the question, "Why is there only one God?" a pupil answered,
"Because God fills every place, and there's no room for anyone else." When
asked to explain the difference in the role of the Creator and the Savior one child
responded, "God puts us down and Jesus takes us back up."

The early Christians discovered they simply could not speak of God without
speaking of the three ways in which God reveals God's self to them. This does

not mean that there are three Gods. It means that there is one God who has shown God's self in three ways: Creating parent, reconciling child, and inspiring life force. Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Movement 1 God creates

Let us talk first about the creating nature of God.

In the cartoon BLOOM COUNTY, little Oliver is sitting on the edge of the fence looking at the moon and stars. Suddenly, the stars spell out: "Repent, Oliver!"

Oliver says, "Bloody difficult being an atheist these days."

Another story. A group of scientists decide that humankind has come a long way and no longer needs God. So they chose one scientist to go and tell God that they were through with him. The scientist said, "We've advanced to where we can clone people and do many miraculous things, so we've decided that we no longer need you." God listened patiently, then replied: "Very well. Then let's have a creation contest." "Good idea," the scientist said. "But," God said, "we'll do it just like I did back in the good old days with Adam." "No problem," the scientist said, bending down and grabbing a handful of dirt.

"No, you go get your own dirt!" God said

The issue is not whether or not there is a God. Ninety-six percent of all Americans, Mr. Gallop tells us, believe in the existence of a God in some form or another. The real question is what kind of a God?

According to Thomas Jefferson, for example, God was like a big cosmic watchmaker. He created the universe and wound it up and let it go. The world is now in the process of simply letting itself run down. God has completely detached himself from his creation.

I saw somewhere a church bulletin blooper. The choir anthem was listed, "Hallelujah, the Lord God Omnipotent Resigneth." As Christians we do not believe God has resigned. We do not believe we have been left home alone.

That is not what you and I believe. We affirm that the same God who molded the universe also cares about what happens in our life.

The fact that we refer to the first person of the Trinity as Father says something about what God is like. In fact, Jesus went so far as to refer to God not only as Father but as Abba, which is the Hebrew word meaning Daddy. Can you imagine referring to the creator of an endless universe, the creator of countless solar systems as Daddy. If we could only think of God as that loving daddy in the parable of the prodigal son, who waits patiently for us while we foolishly wonder

off to the far countries in our life and do our own thing. Then, when we have come to ourselves, he runs to meet us when we first appear on the horizon, and joyfully takes us back in. I like the book, "The Shack." In this book, God appears as sort of an Aunt Jemima making pancakes. I am convinced God is neither male nor female. God is like the mother who will not turn away her nursing child.

Yes, there are stern images of God in the Old and New Testaments, and even in the Gospels themselves. But the love of God is the major emphasis, which runs throughout the Bible. A love given in spite of what we have done; a love that is not earned; a love that comes despite our resistance; a love that heals our sick souls; a love that to this day restores, restores, and restores. The prophet Jeremiah caught the true message of our religion when he heard God say to him, "I have loved you with an everlasting love."

But an image of God as a distant creating parent who loves us from afar is not a wide angle view. It is a telescopic view. Christians affirm trust in a God who reconciles.

Movement 2 God reconciles

We say God took on human form, came and lived among us, suffered the same trials that we suffer, experienced the same feelings that we experience. Yes, God is not the same as humankind. And yet God put on human flesh to show us that God feels our pain. Put on flesh in the form of Jesus.

Someone once asked Mrs. Albert Einstein if she understood her husband's theory of relativity. No, she said, but I know my husband. We cannot begin to fathom the incomprehensible mysteries of God, but that does not mean that we cannot know God. If God, choosing to make God's self known to us, comes in the person of Jesus Christ and says I am your brother, and let me show you the heavenly parent, then by the Holy Spirit you can know God. Intimately. Personally.

A child sits in her mother's lap looking at a magazine with her. When they come across an idealized picture of Jesus, her mother asked, "Do you know who that is?" "Yes," the young child said matter-of-factly, "He goes to our church."

There is the story of a prince who wanted to find a life partner to be his queen. One day while running an errand in the local village he passed through a poor section. As he glanced out the windows of the carriage his eyes fell upon a beautiful peasant maiden. He often passed by the young lady in the following weeks and soon fell in love. But he had a problem. How would he woo her?

He could order her to marry him. But even a prince wants his bride to marry him freely and voluntarily and not through coercion. He could put on his most splendid uniform and drive up to her front door in a carriage drawn by six horses.

But if he did this he would never be certain that the maiden loved him or was simply overwhelmed with all of the splendor. The prince came up with another solution. He would give up his robes, move into the village, entering not with a crown but in the garb of a peasant. He lived among the people, shared their interests and concerns, and talked their language. In time the maiden grew to love him for who he was and loved him because he had first loved her.

This story explains what Christians mean by the incarnation. God came and lived among us. I am glad that this happened for two reasons: One, it shows beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is with us, that he is on our side, and that he loves us. Secondly, it gives us a first hand view of what the mind of God is really all about. When people ask what God is like, we Christians point to the person of Jesus. God himself is incomprehensible. But in Jesus this incomprehensible God makes himself knowable. In the person of Jesus we are told that mysterious Other who created the stars and the universe is willing to go all of the way, even to a cross, so that a single person may be redeemed and rescued. That's what God is like. That's the God we say we believe in when we say we trust in Jesus.

Another story. A Sunday school teacher was asking her first-grade class a question, and expecting the answer to be, "Jesus." One little girl called out, "God!" The teacher gently suggested she try again. Another little girl piped up, "Jesus!" When the teacher congratulated her on the correct answer, the first little girl said in a huff, "Yeah. That's what I meant--Jesus. But I call him "God" for short."

But this is not exactly right. There is a difference. It is hard to look at Jesus and imagine that a human form created the very planet on which he stands. And Jesus never draws attention to himself. He always points to God. Jesus is but one aspect of God. God wrapped in human flesh.

But Jesus' physical body has died and gone to heaven, and is no longer here. The philosopher Nitché says that indeed, there was once a God, but that he is now dead. That the God of the universe so completely poured himself into the person of Jesus that when Jesus died on the cross God himself died. So to explain God as limited to Jesus is once again a telescopic view. We Christians believe differently. We Christians trust that after Jesus rose to heaven, that God sent God's Spirit to us individually, and to the church, on the day of Pentecost, the church's birthday.

Movement 3 God inspires

Who is God's Spirit? God's Spirit gives and renews life. Christians trust in God's Spirit, which justifies us by grace through faith, sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor, and binds us together with all believers in the one body of Christ, the church.

God the Father who is for us, God the Son who is with us, and God the Holy Spirit who is within and around us.

God's Spirit can be understood in a story or two. Two little girls were once studying a portrait of Queen Victoria. "What's she doing?" asked the one little girl. The other gazed hard at the picture, then replied, "Oh, she is not doing anything. She's just reigning." God is NOT like this. God's reign is not passive, it is powerful and active.

Lee Trevino was involved in an incident in a PGA tournament. Lightning struck a tree near him. Someone asked Trevino what he thought when lightning struck that tree. He replied, "I learned that when God wants to play through you had better let him." God's Spirit is like that. When God's Spirit is on the move, we need to let God play through. Or maybe even join God.

There is the story of the army recruit standing at attention on the drill field. The drill instructor yells, "Forward, march!" And the entire ranks begin to move, all except this one new recruit. He's still standing there at attention. So the drill instructor strolls over to him and yells in his right ear, "Is this ear working?"

"Sir, yes, sir!" The recruit yells.

Then the drill instructor walks around to the other ear and yells, "Is this ear working?"

"Sir, yes, sir!" The soldier says.

"Then why didn't you march when I gave the order?"

"Sir, I didn't hear you call my name."

Some of us are like that soldier standing around waiting for God to call our names. But the great commission in Matthew 28 is a blanket order. It has everyone's name on it. And you can be sure that the man in charge says, "Go! Bring others to me!"

Conclusion

Religious anthropologists tell us all cultures and religious organizations hold up ideals they consider important, and then give those attributes to God. Attributes to which that culture or religious organization aspires. If you want to know a culture's values, look at the attributes it gives to the God it worships. When a culture holds up an ideal, and attributes it to God, they are totemizing the idea, like a totem pole. What I wish to suggest to you today is that if a church fails to totemize any of the three parts of our triune God, it is in trouble.

Show me a church who deemphasizes God the creator, the one Jesus called Abba, and I will show you a church that believes it can pull itself up by its own bootstraps. A church of humanists. In short, a country club. Individuals will become profoundly anxious when they discover they cannot do what they want without God's help.

Show me a church who deemphasizes the merciful and reconciling nature of Jesus, and I will show you a church that is characterized by judgmentalism. A church that is quick to exclude others. A church that creates bitterness, fear, and shame in its wake. In short, a divided church.

Show me a church who deemphasizes God's powerful, energizing, and comforting Spirit, and I will show you a church that is apathetic. A church that is inattentive to the hungry, the sick and the oppressed. A church suffering from burnout. A church of folks who do not realize that if they focus on others, their own problems will seem to melt away.

But a church like ours, a church which sings to, and gives thanks to, the creating God who Jesus called Abba, is open to new ideas and participates in a new creation.

A church like ours which worships the reconciling God we see in Jesus, is reconciled to God and to itself, and will work toward reconciliation within its community.

And a church like ours which worships the energizing, inspiring, and transforming God we see in God's Spirit, receives inspiration from God, and gives inspiration to others.

Yes, a church like ours, which perceives all three attributes of the character of God, grows in spirituality.

Glory be to God, Hallelujah, and all God's children say ...