**May 27, 2018; Trinity Sunday**

**Romans 8:12-17**

Who is this triune God whom we worship and serve?

Father, Son, Holy Spirit OR Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Mother, Child, and Womb of Life.

Holy One, Holy Three.

The Three-in-One.

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.

Sovereign, Savior, and Presence.

Fountain, Living Water, and River of Life.

Rock, Cornerstone, and Temple.

Speaker, Word, and Breath.

Sun, Light, and Burning Ray.

Fire, Sword, and Storm.

Rainbow of Promise, Ark of Salvation, and Dove of Peace.

Giver, Gift, and Giving.

Lover, Beloved, and Love itself.

Source of Love, Love Incarnate, and Love’s Power.

Source of Life, Living Word, and Bond of Love.

How we call God is directly connected to who we understand God to be. Although we read in the first chapters of Genesis that we are made in God’s image (the *imago dei*), we cannot help but name and define God based on who we are and what we know. Our language and our experience is our limitation in describing a limitless God. We have only the words we know, the colors we see, and the experiences we’ve had to tell and paint and sing our stories.

The prophet Isaiah struggles with this very conundrum. He had a vision of God sitting on the throne, but he did not have words to describe God. He described the *room* around God and the winged attendants -- there was a robe, there were flying things, there was smoke, there was language. But he couldn’t put words around who God was, or what God looked like, or how it felt to be standing in God’s presence. All Isaiah could muster was, “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, yet I have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” Isaiah is one of the few people who saw the Lord, and he was practically left speechless; he could only say “I’m not worthy.” (which is probably the most honest response!)

But what about the rest of us? For the generations who have come after Isaiah, we rely upon the Bible’s words to give us language to shape our own faith. We open the Bible’s pages hoping for specific details and clear answers, then learn that God’s presence is so BIG, so Almighty, so holy, that words can’t justify the experience of knowing and hearing and seeing God.

Even if the biblical authors and characters had trouble putting words around God, the writers of our historical Creeds and Confessions made up for their predecessors’ brevity. Perhaps to a fault, later theologians have written volumes about who God is, though their descriptions tended toward the vague and esoteric, often raising more questions than answering. Is God a person or a thing? Is God to be addressed as “who” or “which?” Should gender be used in referring to God – male or female or it? Should formal language be used, and pronouns capitalized?

Nothing truly encompasses the entirety or exactitude of who God is. The refrain of one hymn sings it best: “May the church at prayer recall that no singly holy name but the truth behind them all is the God whom we proclaim.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Another newer hymn sings, “Great, living God, never fully known, joyful darkness far beyond our seeing, closer yet than breathing, everlasting home: Hail and hosanna, great, living God!” [[2]](#footnote-2)

At the heart of God’s triune identity is a relationship wherein each person works and lives together, with each person leading and following the other persons of God. God the Father, Christ the Son, and Holy Spirit. Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. None is in change, nor are any less than the others. They are equal in their Almighty glory, equal in their tasks. In their triune being, God is exponentially more God’s-self. God’s love is fully present to the world in 3 persons. God’s grace is 3-fold more abundant.

If we as individuals are made in the *imago dei*, and if we also see God in our image, perhaps we should take this collaborative, non-hierarchical relationship to heart. We are meant to be in partnership with one another (and with God). We are not meant to stand alone or do life alone. We are not meant to work alone. We are meant to magnify the Triune God as we live and work and play with others (and with God).

The Church, too, is like the Triune God in its being. The Church is not meant to stand alone or live alone or work alone. The Church is meant for relationship – with God, with the world, and with our members. We are meant to magnify the Triune God as we live and work and play with others.

You know this when you sing a hymn in the congregation, and hear and feel the roar of God’s Spirit in the church and God’s people in worship. You know this when you prepare a meal or a card for someone who is sick, then place it in their weary hands. You know this when you work alongside other Christians, together bringing God’s love and mercy to the world.

We know that we are meant for relationship, and yet our fears and our stuck-ness prevent us from reaching out and building and tending to others. When asked in a church-sponsored poll, the #1 reason Presbyterians don’t invite people to church is that we don’t know people outside the church. We aren’t in relationship with people outside our congregation. While this may be a sign that we are surrounding ourselves with people of similar values, who may encourage us and pray for us, it also shows our insular tendencies. Just as the disciples were called beyond themselves on Pentecost, the church is called beyond these walls and beyond our rolls. We need to get outside to meet *other* people. We need to know our neighbors’ names and care for them in familiar ways. We need to be involved in other community organizations. We need to be seen in other places. We need to get to know people beyond the cursory smile and nod, joining them wherever they are – wherever else we go – so that we can be Christ’s light in the world. To invite them inside the church, of course! But more importantly, to simply live and love and show God’s grace to the world.

We have the opportunity to live as Pentecostal people every day. We can speak in places and in ways that the world hears, moving ourselves outside the church ways, just as Jesus moved away from his comfortable, heavenly God-home when he came to earth. And, as in the Romans text, we need to move beyond those easy obvious first-born children to those on the outside who desperately need a spiritual family. We need to move to those on the margins – those who are hungry and unwanted. We move closer to them in order that they might see God working within us, and might be drawn in. We aren’t looking for people to dominate, or people over whom we can lord our experience or privilege, but for people who will come and share this dance with God with us.

Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, said, “The whole story of creation, incarnation, and our incorporation into the fellowship of Christ’s body tell us that God desires us, as if we were God... The life of the Christian community … [is tasked with] teaching us this: so that human beings may see themselves as desired, as occasion as of joy.”

Because God is relational, we are relational. Because God is creative, we have life. Because God is loving, we are loving. Because God is generous, we are a grateful people. Without God, who are we?

While it is beyond our human ability to truly understand and describe the One whom we worship, we certainly have a sense of the large and small ways that God’s identity shapes our own. Perhaps, like Isaiah, we too should respond with celebration instead of explanation. With brevity insetad of verbosity, humility instead of expertise. “Holy Holy, Holy Lord, we are not worthy to speak.” So on this Trinity Sunday, let us celebrate the mystery of God, and worship God in fullness and in truth, as best we can. Amen.

1. “Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud” text by Thomas H. Troeger. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Bring Many Names” text by Brian Wren. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)