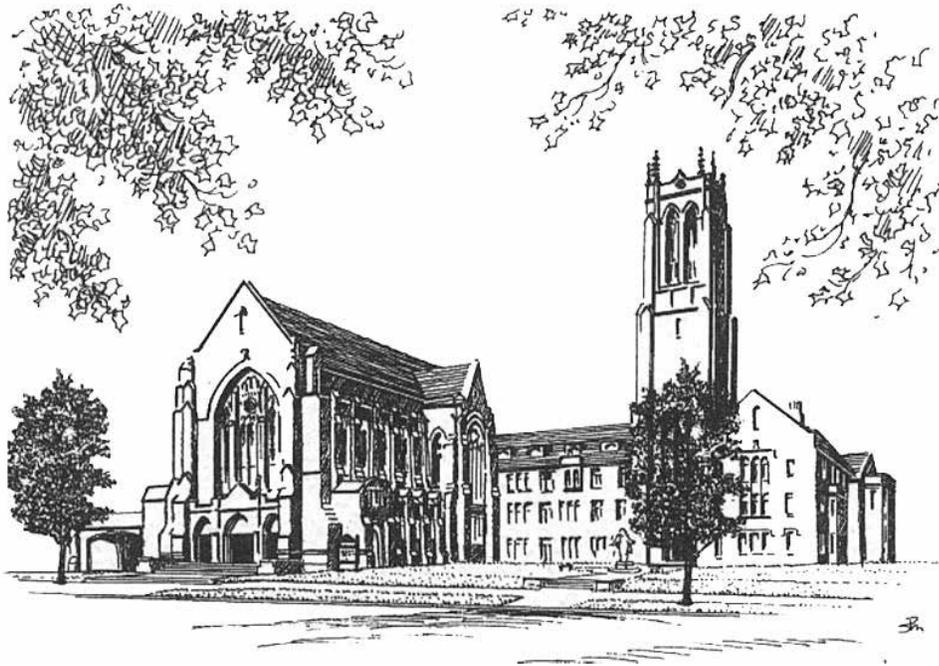


GOD 3.0
by
Rev. Thomas A. (Tommy) Williams
June 15, 2014
Trinity Sunday
8:30 and 11:05 a.m.



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Texts:

Genesis 1:1-2, 4a; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

Today we worship a relational God. This God we proclaim in Word and song created us for relationship with Himself and with one another.

This Trinity Sunday we claim that in the very core of God's being is relationship — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God — Christ — Holy Spirit. In that mystery we affirm that God is known and expressed in these three ways throughout history, since the beginning.

While the claim of one God in three persons is difficult to comprehend, this understanding was formulated by the early church with a combination of interpretations of scripture and the experience of early Christians.

The Trinitarian God helps us to know and experience God in a multitude of ways.

In fact, we live in a world that understands relationships in a multitude of ways now. And because we live in this world, I believe that the Trinitarian understanding of God as a God of relationship could get a fresh hearing in this world and renew the faithful's experience of it also.

Let me tell you what I mean by allowing me a bit of pop cultural education time. For some of you review and others not.

As many of you know, social networking is the broad category we use to describe certain ways of communicating that we have available to us in today's world. Some of the more famous include Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Google+, and many many more exist. This is commonly known as Web 2.0. That is, we can interact with the content we are viewing online. We are not just readers of content, but we can comment on it, post content ourselves that responds to what we have read. We can vote in online polls that ask our opinions about all sorts of things, and so on. These are certain kinds of relationships albeit it with a computer or smart phone between us and the actual human.

Social networks allow us to connect with people all across the world with the click of a button. What makes this social networking powerful is not just that we can talk and get to know others around the world that we never would have otherwise, but, as we have seen in in the news, social networking has and can be used to guide people, lead people, and gather people. And when you can do that, revolutions happen.

Egypt is a prime recent example of when this phenomenon burst onto the scene. You remember in 2011 when the revolution in Egypt broke out in Tahir Square of Cairo. It was through social networking, largely, that this crowd gathered when they did in what eventually overthrew the government.

The so-called Arab Spring that lasted much longer than the Spring (in fact still continues) was and is made possible largely through social networking that furthers these revolutionary ends. Some towards potentially good ends, others towards evil and chaos. Like any human construct, it is a double-sided coin.

Here is a tweet from a Palestinian student in Cairo in 2011: “I can hear the IDF drones overhead. Makes it hard to study for my test tomorrow.” And you didn’t have to be in Cairo to feel the tension when virtual friends texted, “I’m in Tahrir Square right now. The security forces are moving in.”

Did you hear that during this time in Egypt there was even a family who named their child Facebook? It’s true.

The number of people who have accounts on Facebook number so many that Facebook would rank as the third largest nation in the world.

Brittany Spears, Lady Gaga, and Justin Bieber have more people following them on Twitter than the nation of Israel has people.

A new member joins the LinkedIn professional network every second of every day. One in three couples now meet online, and the examples of networking go on and on.

With 50 percent of the world’s population under 30, people are connecting in multi layered relationships which mean very different things — again,

some healthy, some not, some faithful, some not. But relationships have always been and certainly now are understood in a variety of ways.

If Web 2.0 relationships are two-dimensional, if you will — a person interacting with a source by commenting, posting on a blog, etc. Then the next wave is called 3.0 — there's content, you interact with it, and it interacts back with you.

Web 3.0 will make tasks like your search for movies and food faster and easier. Instead of multiple searches, you might type a sentence or two in your Web 3.0 browser, and the Web will do the rest. In one example, you could type "I want to see a funny movie and then eat at a good Mexican restaurant. What are my options?" The Web 3.0 browser will analyze your response, search the Internet for all possible answers, and then organize the results for you.

That's not all.

Many of the experts believe that the Web 3.0 browser will act like a personal assistant. As you search the Web, the browser learns what you are interested in. The more you use the Web, the more your browser learns about you and the less specific you'll need to be with your questions. Eventually you might be able to ask your browser open questions like "where should I go for lunch?" Your browser would consult its records of what you like and dislike, take into account your current location, and then suggest a list of restaurants.

Now I can tell that some of you are a little creeped out by this and others are excited.

And what does all of this have to do with Trinity Sunday and the Triune God?

I think our modern culture is actually prepared to entertain or take a second look at notions of a Triune God — multi relational, interactive, and multi-dimensional. And any of us here at whatever place of faith, could and should re-engage this tradition, too.

Was it formally put together by a church council hundreds of years after the time of Christ?

Yes.

Was it an all-male assembly with infighting and political posturing?

Probably.

Is the formula itself primarily patriarchal in its language — Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

Sure.

One has to decide, indeed the church as a whole must decide: did the Holy Spirit work with the early councils in spite of politics and patriarchs?

I have to believe so or else I'm not sure why I or any of us are here.

Can we overcome biases and our very humanity to be the church?

I have to believe so by the grace of God.

For the longest time we have assumed that faith is an either/or - you either believe in God or you don't.

The question before us in the past and for many still is, "Is there a god?"

Now, with younger generations, as researcher Mary Jane Pierce Norton suggests from her work, the question is not always an either/or proposition. It is not necessarily, "Is there a god," but, "Which god is it?"

With globalization and the increasing connectedness of our world, we are familiar with all sorts of religious traditions and notions about god or gods. There is a global cafeteria, or religious buffet of sorts, within which people choose — a little Zen Buddhism, a little Lakewood Church and some Yoga and rosary beads mixed it for good measure. People have supplemental faith practices all the time.

In part because of this diversity of exposure, questions about the historical claims of Christianity like the Trinity or miracles are less the question than they once were. The social science research indicates that younger generations are more than happy to entertain the possibility of mysteries and miracles.

The question is more about the people who live the truth out. Is this group of people to be trusted?

As one commentator put it: “The best apologetic for a faith is less in well laid arguments and more in the witness of the people who adhere to that faith. Our lives are the best apologetic.”

I actually believe that our society in its familiarity with a matrix of relationships is prepared to welcome anew conversations about this Three-in-One God that we claim created the world, redeemed that world, and continues to be a force within that world:

This God who is real relationship in Itself.

This God who is creative and came in the flesh,.

This God who is a constant companion in the Holy Spirit.

This God who is not contained in a shrine somewhere or whose tomb is a sign of its death.

This dynamic Triune God is alive and active and calling us toward action in the world!

This is what we hear in this Great Commission of Jesus in Matthew.

And so *our* claim about this God, dear friends, has almost nothing to do with the science of creation but the Who, the What, and the Why behind that creation.

Our claim, dear friends, has to do with this God who came in Jesus and what his life, death, and resurrection say about our life as His body on earth; that is, the church.

Our claim, dear friends, has less to do with what languages we speak or how Pentecostal we should or shouldn't be, but rather how the power of the Holy Spirit can transform our understandings and unify an improbable group of people.

Through the power and example of the Triune God, we in our own relationships can strive to mirror God's own togetherness, if you will.

Being a faith community then calls us to a radical discipleship that reflects the divine image of God who itself is community in the Trinity. A church is a church in its fullness when it calls upon all three expressions of God to

shape its life. This is the truth the skeptics are waiting to see, this is the truth all of us want to see — that the Trinitarian people of God live the claims of this relational God who came in the flesh and remains with us in the Spirit, sending us out to go into the world to baptize, teach, obey, and serve.

One such example of discipleship and community was modeled by a man named Clarence Jordan.

Born in Talbotton, Georgia, in 1912, he was the seventh of ten children. He was taught a vision of racial equality but was increasingly bothered that these teachings were in stark contrast to the racial discrimination he regularly witnessed outside church walls, not to mention the racial segregation in the church.

After graduating high school, Clarence earned a degree in agriculture from the University of Georgia, then a Ph.D. in the Greek New Testament from a seminary. He felt called to take Jesus' demanding words seriously. As his days of formal schooling were ending, plans began to take shape to found a community to be called "Koinonia Farms," named after the Greek word for "fellowship or communion." He sought to unite his twin passion for agriculture and scripture with his commitment to radical Christian discipleship. It would hopefully be, in Clarence's words, a "demonstration plot for the kingdom of God."

In 1942, Clarence, his wife, and another couple purchased 440 acres of land in Sumter County near Americus, Georgia, about three hours south of Atlanta. But trouble came almost immediately. From the beginning they had put racial equality into practice by inviting the workers on the farm to eat together, irrespective of race. This choice quickly spurred the local Ku Klux Klan into action. There were many caustic encounters with local racist residents, and one of his favorite questions for those with loyalties to their heritage was, **"Your choice seems quite clear. It is whether you will follow your granddaddy or Jesus Christ."**

Koinonia Farms became Koinonia Partners, which eventually birthed Habitat for Humanity International under the leadership of Millard Fuller, who was deeply inspired by Clarence Jordan.

In describing a true Trinitarian church Jordan said this:

The proof that God raised Jesus from the dead is not the empty tomb, but the full hearts of his transformed disciples. The crowning evidence that Jesus lives is not a vacant grave, but a spirit-filled fellowship. Not a rolled-away stone, but a carried-away church.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we are commanded to go and baptize in the name of that Triune God for we have overheard Jesus addressing the one he calls “Father” in prayer. In the Gospel of John, we hear constant talk from Jesus about the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, who will continue the action when Jesus returns to the Father. In the Gospel of Luke, at Jesus’ baptism, we overhear a voice from above calling Jesus the Beloved Son.

In this claim about God, we are saying that this God is not static or monolithic but is a dynamic God who is a relational being at the core and, therefore, God’s people mirror the same with our God and with each other.

The calling is to GO. This is at the very heart of the New Testament definition of church — to be called out. It began with those 11 on the mountain and continues with us.

And we remember, dear friends, that God is with us wherever we go. The same God who created you and this whole world we inhabit. The same God who birthed himself into the world in Jesus, the same God who resides in us and in the church through the Holy Spirit, goes with us into our homes, our work, into this world in mission.

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