

June 11, 2017
2 Corinthians 13:11-13
Matthew 28:16-20

The Three-In-One Mission

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. That's how we do things in the church. That's how we do baptism. That's how we do the Lord's Supper. That's how we do mission as going out into the world in God's name. We go by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. That's how we do things in the church; how it has always been done. In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Those three persons are what we believe God is. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It's called the Trinitarian formula. Sounds scientific, doesn't it? Like it involves test tubes and lab coats. But it's really just the three ways we know God according to the Bible. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And each of those persons is distinct and yet made of the same stuff. Each one is equally God and yet not God without the others. Our God is three and yet one. It's not easy to wrap your mind around how God is God and also the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And they aren't the same, but, wait, they kind of are. Maybe like me, you feel like you

need to be a scientist or at least have a PhD to understand the idea of the Trinity.

It can be intimidating to get into the philosophical world of the divine, where everything ends in an ‘ology’ and you feel like hairs are being split and one false move and you’ll end up as a heretic. But today I want to assure you that that is not my goal. And that really, all of this Trinity stuff, is something wonderful. That the Three-in-One of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is something beautiful: That it reveals a God who is about relationship. That relationship is the essence of God and relationship is the mission of God. And that is what makes our God different than all the other gods out there. I find it helpful to think of our Triune God in this way: as the God who is Beyond us, as the God who is With us, and as the God who Connects us.¹

Relationship is who God is and what God is about. Relationship is the mission of God. And that mission began in the beginning. When our Three-in-One God was creating. And darkness covered the face of the

¹ Based on Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 204-205.

deep. And the Word was with God. And the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. In the beginning the Trinity was there: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And in the beginning, God had a mission. To make a good creation and to be in relationship with it. Now this story of creation from Genesis is a story we know. It doesn't sound unusual to us, but it was unusual when it was written down in the 5th and 6th centuries BCE. The idea of a good God creating a good world and wanting a good relationship with it was unusual. Because that world was a world of Babylonian gods and Egyptian gods. And the Babylonian gods created the world with violence. And the Egyptian gods created the world through sex. In every other religion, the world was born of conflict and jealousy and lust. And humans were created in the midst of this to be slaves of the gods. But it was not so with the God of Israel. The Hebrew God of our Bible was different. There was no conflict and no conjugal visits. This God spoke creation into being and called it good. This God created humans in God's own image to love and be loved in relationship.

It was a different kind of story. And God was on a different kind of mission. Not a mission to accumulate wealth and power and praise. But on a mission to enjoy life and call it good. That was the mission of the God Beyond us. The Creator and Father of all, the first person of the Trinity. And yet it was not enough for this Creator to be Beyond us. This Creator also wanted to be God With us. To know us and abide with us. Over and over again in the Bible, we see that is God's mission; to be God With us. Even when we are not With God. Even when we are Against God or Away from God, God seeks us. God seeks the people of Israel when they are lost. God seeks us when we wander and forget ourselves. This is God's way: to be With us, to be beside us and to near us and for us, because God can't help it. That's who God is in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, is God With us. And maybe that doesn't sound all that strange in our world. But in Jesus' time, to say he was the Son of God was very strange. Because there were lots of Sons of God out there. And Jesus wasn't like them. The Greek and Roman Sons of God were superheroes. They had divine abilities and

did mighty deeds. Like stealing treasures and defeating enemies. They earned earthly honor and glory. They got the kingdom and they usually got the girl. But Jesus, the Son of God, didn't do those things. He did not seek to Conquer us. To be Over us or Against us or God Instead of us or God In Spite of us. Instead he was God With us. Even when we opposed him. Even when we rejected him and put him on a cross. Because God is on a mission to be With us, no matter what. To be With us human beings in life and in death. To be With us when we are sick or hurting or mistaken or alone. To be With us when we are the enemy, or the outcast or the prodigal or the least of these. To be with us when we are the poor, the nobody, the stranger, the refugee, the criminal. To be With us even when, especially when, we don't think that God should be. Or that God could be, because how could God love us, or them? But our God who is Beyond our understanding and our motives, wants to make all of creation good. All of it. And God will not stop until it is finished. God can't help it. God has a mission and will be faithful to the mission even if it means give up heaven for us, and giving up glory for us and going to hell and back for us, just to be God With us.

That is what the apostle Paul is telling the church at Corinth today. He is reminding them who they are and who God is. And that God is on a mission to be With them. And they are on that same mission to be With one another. Not Above one another. Or Against one another. Or In Spite of one another. “Put things in order,” Paul says, Be WITH one another. “Agree with each other; live in peace.” Because the Corinthians weren’t living in peace. They weren’t agreeing with one another. If there was a fight to be had, this church found a way to have it. They were consumed with factions and feuds about communion and circumcision and ordination. They were experts at gossiping and name-calling and finding fault with one another. And Paul is frustrated with these Corinthians. “Examine yourselves to see if you are living in the faith!”² Because they know God’s mission in Jesus Christ. They know God With us. But they are not WITH one another. They are fractured and splintered and divided. “Put things in order”, Paul tells them. Be WITH each other as God is With you. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All

² 2 Corinthians 13:5

different but the same, with one mission and purpose. As God is, so you should be. So the church should be.

The God who is Beyond us, is God With us. And also the God who Connects us. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, connects everything. Like the Force in the Star Wars movies, it is through all and in all. It is the momentum of love. It is the gravity of hope. It is the energy of grace that enlivens us and comforts us and challenges us and brings us together. It is prophetic and convicting and consoling. And it is always going forth into the world on God's mission to reconnect everything to God again.

That's what Jesus is talking about with his disciples today in Matthew's gospel. He is giving his final instructions to the disciples. Here is the mission of God, their mission FROM God, should they choose to accept it; to GO forth into the world and connect with them. To baptize and teach and make disciples of all kinds of people everywhere. To repair and restore and renew and help put God's creation back together. To

reconnect people with the source of all life and love. They have a mission. God has a mission. And God's mission has a church.³

The essence of God is relationship. The Triune nature of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit means that God is never alone or in isolation. And I think that is what makes us different from the gods of the world today. That is what makes us our God different. In a world where being an individual is what matters, and being able to do it all on your own and living without regard to others. Our God insists on being in community and cooperating in relationship. And that's how God has made the church to be. Not to do things in isolation, by itself, for itself. Jesus tells the disciples to Go forth into the world and be part of God's new creation. Go forth and build relationships and connect with others and reconnect them with grace and love and God. And I see the wonderful ways our church is doing that. By going out and connecting with new friends in the Community Garden. By going out and cooperating with the Methodist Church with Sunday School. By going out and

³ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology*, London: SCM Press, 1977, 64

communing with St Matthew AME in worship and connecting with Refugee Families and with kids in the Backpack ministry and at Uspiritus. You have gone out by blessing a ministry with Lee and Sara to reach the youth out there who are just as lost and alone as any of us. You all are doing a counter-cultural thing. You are on a mission from God to connect creation and to make creation good again.

The Holy Spirit calls us to go forth. It is the Still Small voice, still speaking to us. Calling us out into new territories with new people. It is the still small voice that speaks to us, saying things like, I wonder how that neighbor is doing. I wonder if those kids have enough to eat. I wonder if I can be love and mercy in this world. Let me visit the sick or elderly. Let me bless the anxious and angry. Let me be compassionate wherever I am today. The God who Connects us, sends us forth on that mission.

Relationship is the essence of God and it is the mission of God. And God has a church with a mission to love and serve. To remind all of creation of the One who is Beyond us and the One who is With us, and the One who Connects us. And to that mission, to that end, God is

forever faithful. To that mission, to that end, God is calling us. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.