



Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church
Connecting faith with everyday life

Sermon Archives

Date: May 22, 2016

Title: "They Call Me Trinity"

Scripture: John 16: 4-11

Description: Our belief in a God who is Trinity results in affirming that relationships are of ultimate significance.

"God is love." That sounds bouncy, doesn't it. Upbeat, sparkling like a mountain waterfall. "God is love."

"God is Trinity"—not so much. Cold and boring like the lecture in an eight o'clock history class. But God is Trinity is what gets you to God is love.

The Trinity. It isn't just an intellectual exercise. No kidding, knowledge of the God of the Trinity turns lives around and injects joy. That sounds like a bit of a stretch, right? Especially if you've heard any of those desperate-sounding illustrations that try to explain it. "The Trinity is like an egg that has a shell and a yoke and egg white, but they're all egg!" "No, the Trinity is like a tree that has branches and leaves and a trunk, just like the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." And you wonder why people's eyes glaze over. Whether it gets explained by using bacon (I'll give you a moment to figure that one out: you have the lean, the fat, and the sizzle.) or the three states of H₂O or a three-headed giant, it sounds like stuff made up by bored monks on a rainy afternoon. It all seems pointless and complicated. Why not just love Jesus and teach us how to improve our marriage?

Because it's "God is Trinity" that gets you to "God is love." The Trinity says that God is all about relationships. The Trinity celebrates the power of relationships. Trinity celebrates the importance and indispensability of relationships. What makes relationships the everlasting quality of our lives instead of the value of our net worth? It's that God *is* relationships because God is Trinity. God isn't a thing, a concept, even a dazzling light or a blazing fire. God is a relationship, a relationship of three persons. These three persons—whether you call them "Father," "Son" and "Holy Spirit", or "Creator", "Christ", and "Life-Giver"—these three persons are so wonderfully related

with one another that we call them one, and yet so exquisitely different and distinct that they never lose their identity, so we call them three.

That's what makes our God distinct—the Trinity which makes relationship at the core of who God is. Relationship is at the heart of everything.

"Allah is one and there is no other" is the bedrock affirmation of Islam. Allah is pictured on the heavenly throne; he is alone with only the Quran at his side. But the Quran isn't a person, it's a book. So Allah exists alone. In contrast, we sing of "God in three Persons, blessed Trinity. God is the dance between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God doesn't *do* Trinity as some kind of day job, only to kick back and chill in the evening as plain old "God." It isn't that God has a nice blob of Trinity on top. God is relationship. All the way down.

Everything depends on the kind of God you have. We become like that which we adore. In other words, we become like the God we adore. In America today, it's very difficult to see that Christians notice the Trinity, much less adore a Trinity God. Some Christians are all about Jesus and being saved by the cross; some are all about the Creator God and preserving the earth; some are filled with the Holy Ghost. Few of us live our faith in such a way that it's clear we follow a God who is relationships all the way through.

A few decades ago, President John Kennedy challenged America to send the first man to the moon, and then set a deadline. So we did, by the end of the decade, just like the President said we would.¹ Of the 30 Apollo/Gemini astronauts, only seven marriages survived. Those inspiring images of astronauts bouncing on the moon obscure the inability to make meaningful and cherished connections here on earth. The Trinity asks what good is it that we can cross the chasms of space if we don't cross the chasms between people. At the heart, it's about relationships.

There is a pervasive sickness present in our world today. Those who are most committed to doing well are the most vulnerable. The symptoms are busyness and overwork. The frenzy of our pace overcomes our pursuit of peace. Too often our dreams become these fixations on some future that destroy our ability to be alive right now. Our dreams for peace on earth often alienate us from the practice of peace with the person right next to us. We're about accomplishments. Along the way we've abandoned a Trinity God whose core is relationships.

That's the price of progress. You can go to the moon *or* you can have warmth in your family. We don't seem to believe we can acceptably achieve both at the same time. So in our culture's view of marriage, we set the bar at mere stability. Our culture's measurement of warmth is the number of Facebook friends.

Our technology for talking to one another has gone exponential; our ability to connect with and understand one another has gone nowhere. Our access to information is through the roof; our access to each other and our sense of joy in each other — grounded.

Relationships and accomplishment are not mutually exclusive. The idea that to fulfill our potential for doing we have to sacrifice our potential for relating is false. The number of transistors on a circuit can be doubled and doubled again but our capacity for compassion and serenity and love is somehow limited—that is a false and suffocating choice. I'm saying "Human." "Kind." "Be Both." I get that message from the Trinity God. This is the God who created the world, who set the people free from Pharaoh, who showed victory over death, but the God who is also inseparable from relationship, the God who *is* relationship.

I am not preaching a better work-life balance. What good is it to spend more time with people at home if my mind is always somewhere else while I'm doing it? I'm talking about relating as boldly as we accomplish. I'm talking about a strong determination to connect, an audacious authenticity that allows us to cry with one another, a heroic humility that allows us to remove our masks and be real. I'm talking about living as though we were made in the image of a Trinity God.

I want to follow a Trinity God into an era when we become as excited about and as curious about and as scientific about our relationships as we are about our technology. Let's not shrink from relating authentically between "those people" because we just don't understand them. There was a time when we didn't understand space. We're more confident about technology because we've spent more time practicing it. That's called being stuck in a comfort zone. We're very comfortable imagining unimaginable technological achievements. In 2016 it is the dimension of our being itself that cries out for its fair share of our imagination and our commitment. We can chew gum and walk at the same time. We can do multiple things simultaneously. We can invent a new gizmo and have people we deeply love over the long haul. We can place relationships first and not have everything else fall apart. Let's never again say, "I don't have time for you right now; I have to save the world."

What if we envisioned a church that embodied the kind of world that the world truly hopes to be? What if the main thing each one of us experienced gathered here on Sunday mornings was each other? What if our friendships with each other grew exponentially in compassion and authenticity, so that we could often shed honest tears

with each other, instinctively call each other to share a moment of beauty, and simply delight at being in one another's presence without anything going on at all.

What if we gave up the shallow idea that a person can relate to God all alone, "spiritual but not religious," and affirmed that only in each other do we know God at all. But other people are so messy, such a bother, so out of control! And God would smile and say, "Yes, they are aren't they? Made in my image!"

What if we become like the God we adore—and the God we adore is named relationship. God in three persons, Blessed Trinity.

1. Much of this material came from Dan Pallotta in a Ted Talk given in February, 2016, titled "The Dream We Haven't Dared to Dream."