

5-18-2008, Trinity Sunday A  
Chapelwood UMC, Lake Jackson

A Different Picture of God  
Matthew 28:16-20

The Sunday after Pentecost is traditionally Trinity Sunday. We spend all that time talking about the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday, and it naturally leads to questions about the relationship of the Holy Spirit to God. And that leads to talking about the Trinity.

There's a story about a little boy in Sunday School who was working away drawing a picture. His teacher asked, "Timmy, what are you drawing." Timmy said, "I'm drawing a picture of God." The teacher said, "But, Timmy, nobody knows what God looks like." Timmy, "When I'm finished drawing my picture, they'll know what God looks like."

The truth is that we could all draw a picture of God. We all have a picture of God in our hearts. In fact, most of us have the same picture. Take a moment and think of the picture that comes to mind when you think about God. Most likely it is the picture presented by the Renaissance artists. It is an older man, who is very masculine and muscular, with a long, white flowing beard, sitting on a throne issuing orders to direct the events in heaven and on earth. He is alone, except for the hosts of heaven bowed down around him and singing his praises. He is very serious and somber, even stern.

Now, let me suggest a different picture of God. Picture three persons embracing one another in a group hug. They obviously have a great love for each other and very much enjoy being together. They are talking together, as they carefully work together on a great and wonderful project, sharing responsibilities, authority and decision-making.

These are two very different pictures of God. The first picture I call the picture of the Solitary God. The second I call the picture of the Trinitarian God. Which one is more accurate? As Christians, we believe the picture of the three united in love and purpose is the more accurate image of God.

Now, let me ask another question: What difference does it make how we picture God? Isn't all this talk about God as a Trinity just academic mumbo-jumbo, an intellectual exercise by spiritual eggheads that really doesn't have any affect in the way we live our lives?

That is what a lot of people think. They are very, very wrong. The picture of God that we carry around in our hearts has a tremendous influence on the way we live and act.

Why? Because we want to be like God. God created us to want to be like God. We can't help it. That's just who we are. In the secrets places of our hearts, our ultimate goal in life is to be like God.

Isn't that a good thing? It depends. It can be good. And it can be bad. It depends on what you think God is like. It depends on which picture of God you hold. Your picture of God is the model of what you want to become. If your picture of God is wrong, the results are disastrous.

Satan works very hard at trying to get us to believe in the wrong picture of God.

That is the way it has been from the beginning. Think back to the story of the Garden of Eden. How did the serpent convince Eve to eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? The serpent said to her that if she would eat the fruit from that tree, she would be LIKE GOD, knowing good and evil. She was hooked, because she wanted to be like God. The serpent caused Eve to sin by giving her the impression that to be like God is to know and understand everything. Knowledge is power. If you know everything, you can be all powerful, just like God.

Satan has done a masterful job of deceiving the world into thinking that to be like God is to be powerful and adored. That is what most people want in their heart of hearts. They want power and adoration—not too much. They don't want to be God, because then God would punish them for trying to usurp His power. They just want to be like God, with as much power and adoration as they can get away with without challenging God.

Jesus fought against this false picture of God during his entire ministry. One of the temptations posed to him by Satan when he went into the wilderness after being baptized, was to be king of the world. Jesus wanted nothing to do with that. That would have been to buy into the false picture of the solitary God of power. During his ministry on at least one occasion the crowds tried to proclaim him King of the Jews. Jesus went away to a quiet place so they couldn't do that.

But his followers, and even his disciples, just didn't get it. When Jesus was leading the disciples to Jerusalem—on his way to the cross, they were certain he was going to claim the throne of David. He would be just like God, sitting on the throne, ordering people around and receiving praise and adoration. And the disciples were arguing among themselves over the thrones they would sit on. They didn't want Jesus' throne. They all wanted the positions of power just under him. They wanted to be like God, sitting on their thrones. They were still being guided by this picture of the solitary God.

The terrible history of humanity locked in battle is the result of our buying into this picture of the solitary God, as we have fought with each other over the seats of power and prestige, all of us competing to be as much like the solitary God as possible.

What difference does it make if we can replace this picture of the solitary God with the picture of the Trinitarian God, three persons, joined together in a loving fellowship? What difference does that make in the way we live and act? It affects every area of our lives. Let me just give you three examples.

For one thing, we think about committees differently. Committees often don't get much respect. There is the old joke that a camel is a horse that was created by a committee. Many people express disdain for committees. They say, "Just leave me alone to make the decisions by myself, and I will do a far better job than any committee." That is perfectly in line with the picture of God sitting alone on the throne making all these decisions about everything without consulting anybody. When somebody says, "Just leave me alone to run things by myself," they are being true to that image of the solitary God.

But, is that the way God governs? Let's take a second look at the creation story. On the sixth day God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness..." What's this "us" business? What we see there is that the world wasn't created by an old man sitting on a throne issuing orders. The world and everything in it

was created by three persons talking together, making decisions together and working together to make those decisions reality. When you look at the beauty of a blue sky, when you consider the infinite reaches of the universe, when you are amazed at the complexity of living things, remember that this was all created by a committee—a fellowship of persons, working together in harmony.

The Trinitarian picture of God changes the way we understand marriage. With the solitary God, only strong, powerful men were like God. Most men's goal in life is to work up the corporate ladder where they could issue the orders and people would treat them with great respect. Or to build their own business. Or to own their own piece of land. A man's home is his castle, and men dream of owning a big, beautiful home in which his wife and children trust him to make all the decisions and give him honor and respect. They to be obeyed--like God. Their wives are to obey them without question, because they are like God. The children are to be strictly respectful and obedient to their father. Father knows best. A man's house is his castle. He is the king.

But where do the women fit into this picture? The best they can do is to make sure their husbands are powerful and respected, like God, and that they control their husbands. They have to be the power behind the throne. They are also driven to be like God, powerful and adored. They just have to do it without offending God or the men in their lives.

But a marriage modeled after the Trinity is very different. It becomes a partnership. Responsibilities and decision making are shared.

And women can be like God. When we picture God as the Trinity in which power is shared, relationships become more important than being strong and powerful. When we enter into loving relationships, sharing decisions, working together cooperatively for the common good, we are being like God. On the whole women are better at that than men. And the doctrine of the Trinity helps us to understand why we have suspected all along that women are naturally more godlike than men.

Picturing God as a Trinity teaches us that a close fellowship doesn't have to be a closed fellowship. Have you ever been excluded by a clique? Have you ever been a part of a clique that excluded others.

I've told you about my three brothers and how close we are. We love playing together. From the time we were in our early teens, we would go out on Saturday and play doubles tennis together. We got pretty good at it. One of my brothers was the second ranked high school tennis player in the Dallas area. After we married, and we would come home for the holidays, our tradition was to take a morning for the four of us to play tennis together. My mother remarried. Her husband had other children. One of my step-sisters got married. At the next family gathering after their marriage, they came, and when my brothers and I were going out to play tennis, this step-brother-in-law had the audacity to want to play with us. How do you play doubles with five people? And he wasn't very good. After awhile I just got exasperated and said, "Why don't you go do something else?" That's when I realized my brothers and I had become a clique. Isn't it amazing how something as beautiful as the love of brothers can become ugly?

God as the Trinity could have been the ultimate clique. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have been united since before the beginning of time. Their fellowship is from eternity to eternity. They are absolutely and perfectly one.

Have you ever been part of a group which has been close for a very long time? It's hard to let new people in. They change the dynamics of the group. The temptation is to say, "Stay away. We are happy with our little group. We don't want you to come in and spoil it."

God could have said that to us. But we were created for the very purpose of being invited into the fellowship of the Trinity. When you picture the Trinity as three persons in a group hug, you need to see that we are not shut out. They have made a place for us and are inviting us into the midst of this fellowship. We were created to be in fellowship with God.

Although the Trinity has been united in mutual love for all eternity, God does not exclude anyone from this fellowship. God invites us into this eternal circle of love. The Son came into the world, suffering and dying, simply to say to us that all of us have been invited into this divine fellowship. The Spirit whispers in our hearts, calling us, inviting us into the arms of God.

As the church we are being Godlike, when we are a part of a fellowship of people who are openly inviting others to enter into this fellowship. We should have a close fellowship, but not a closed fellowship.

These are just some of the ways that the understanding of God as the Trinity affects our lives. There are many others.

What I am saying this morning is this: Put away that false picture of God as a solitary figure sitting on the throne, running heaven and earth without consulting anyone. Replace it with the more accurate picture of God as three persons united in perfect love and harmony, working together to complete this world which they created as a gift of love to each other.

That picture of the Trinity will transform your life.

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