

SESSION 3-WHO IS THE HOLY TRINITY

REVIEW

1. The overarching question of our first session was “Holy Trinity-Who Cares?” which we answered quite definitely, our church does—as all Christians from Jesus day-include Jesus himself. We observed that the trinity, God referred to as three and on, is so prevalent in our worship and sacraments, that perhaps we are missing something about God and ourselves if we do not feel it important today.
2. We then looked at what the Bible has to say about the trinity and began to transition into the question “What is the Holy Trinity?” We saw that in humankind’s relationship with God over the millennia, as recorded in Holy Scripture, there seems to be a progressive deepening of intimacy in God’s relationship with humanity. He is first revealed as a caring father who creates and sustains us all, and still remains this Father eternally. He then stoops down from heaven, in His love, and comes to earth to journey alongside His creation, righting us from our fall and showing the Way to heaven, and still Jesus is the way to the Father eternally. God then offers His Spirit, who is not just for us like the Father, not just alongside us like the Son, but actually within and through us as Spirit. The Holy Spirit breathes inspiration, guides and counsels all who host the Spirit in their individual and corporate bodies. This presence of God is ongoing in history, happening even now, even here.

FROM BEING TO PERSON-WHAT IS GOD VS. WHO IS GOD

3. But now to today’s session, where we will make a crucial shift in our inquiry about the trinity, moving from the question of “What is the Holy Trinity?” to “Who is the Holy Trinity?” This may seem insignificant and playing with words, but it is not; exploring the two questions “What is God” and “Who is God” reveals something crucial about God and God’s creation.
4. Well let’s start with God’s creation, with us. **What are you?** (ask someone good natured directly) Yes, a human being. This describes your and my nature, our being, things we share in common with other humans, but may or may not share with other animals. I am a human being. I need to breathe oxygen. That is different than other beings, snakes, fish, etc. but same as other mammals like cats and whales. But there are a series of things which are exclusive to human beings. **What are traits basically exclusively to humans?** True speech, walking upright as main form of locomotion, wearing clothes, blushing (and the complexly human emotions and morality behind it), long childhoods, long life after childbirth. And of course something that has characterized all humans at all times, different from the animals is religion, belief, worship, ritual in a higher power. This is the “what” of human being, it is true and an important basis of our being. But there is still something much more, another whole dimension of being human and that is revealed by asking the question “Who are you?”

5. **Who are you?** (ask same person directly). Bobby. Bobby is a name, but more than a name it is an essence of identity, something unrepeatable and unique that is not present in anybody else. He's super hard working, he loves kids, he is loyal and helpful, he passes out a lot... Asking who you are, asks a powerful mystery laded question of what makes Bobby-Bobby, and Fr. Hovnan Fr. Hovnan. What makes Hitler, Hitler and Mother Teresa, Mother Teresa. And by the way, too bad we don't have Christine and Diane here or Art and his brother Ara. Twins of course are the greatest illustration of the difference between "what you are" and "who you are." For twins the "what you are" is almost exactly the same, they share the same exact DNA. Yet often the "who you are," for twins can be radically different, their personalities can be very different. (perhaps bring chilling example of difference "who" makes in twin Asghar brothers rape conviction-exactly same DNA-one was very bad one not)
6. Ok, so I hope we agree and see more fully that, I sit here before you, and you sit here before each other as both a "what you are" and a "who you are." But in church we also sit before God. **How would God answer the question, "What are you?"** I am God, the one Holy God. **Or does anyone know the even shorter answer which God gave Moses and through him all humanity?** I am, Eū ħū, ego eimi. I am, the ground of all existence, I am being itself. Take off your shoes, bow your face to the ground and don't look straight at me, because I am might and holy. Don't even say my name or write it, because I am beyond you. **But if we asked "Who are You," what answer would we get?** I am Father, I am Son, I am Holy Spirit, but one God. And as we spent the entire session last time, the question of "Who Are You" is the implicit question which is asked, developed and revealed throughout our entire Bible. I am the Father who created and sustains all things 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.' Jer 1:5. I am the Son who comes alongside you to show you the way to God; 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Jn 14:6. I am the Holy Spirit who dwells within you and inspires you in this world unto the next. "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" 1 Cor 3:16

1 DIMENSION VS. 3

7. Now careful, God having three "whos" doesn't mean God is divided, it doesn't mean God is schizophrenic. It's just part of the mystery of God. And we shouldn't be surprised or dismayed that this seems fantastic or mind-blowing to us, since if God is God and we are God's creatures, God would exist on a higher level than we can grasp. Since we are made in the image of God, it makes sense that we are less than God. If you take your cell phone and snap a picture of a computer, the picture is like a computer but much less complicated and effective. A computer is three dimensional, and image is two dimensional. It's like that for people and God. You are one "what I am"-human-and one "who I am"-(Edmond). As far as personalities, you and I exist in one dimension. But we are an image and likeness of God who is one Great "what I am" and also three "who I am's." God exists in three dimensions; Father, Son & Holy Spirit.

ANALOGIES OF THE TRINITY REVISITED

8. Ok, so it is very important to recognize God's persons "who," not just God's being "what", just like it is important to not call these guys, three humans without mentioning that they are Bobby, Allan and Edmond and all richly different. To illustrate the "whoness" of God more maybe a new image or metaphor is needed. *[perhaps review quickly if no time]* In our first session I asked you to come up with analogies for understanding the trinity, let's review those first, then try to find an image or metaphor that spotlights the "who," not just the "what" of God. I think Darwin brought the analogy of the egg; shell, yolk and white. Yes it's all one thing, egg, with three different parts. But the analogy breaks down because Father, Son and Holy Spirit, are not parts (what of God) they are three personalities (who of God). We looked at water which can be one substance with different forms of ice, liquid and steam. But this breaks down b/c the same water can't be ice, liquid, steam all at the same time, but we believe that God is not in three forms, but three distinct persons all at the same time. And then there was my metaphor that the trinity is at once one God many persons, just as I am one person but different people in various relationships. I am a son to my parents, a father to Narek and of a church, husband to Anna, etc. all these different people in relationship, but one person. The problem with this is that, to Anna, for example I am a husband and nothing else, whereas God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit to Himself and to all people and things all at the same time! *[perhaps review quickly if no time]*

TRINITY AS PERI-CHORESIS-DANCE

9. And of course in our very old and tradition focused church, if we want to find the new best understanding of anything, the best thing to do is go back to the beginning to see how the Church Fathers approached the Trinity, who thought a lot about these things. To describe the Trinity, they used a term peri-choresis, which is hard to translate in one word, it literally means rotating forward around each other. Any activity of one person of the trinity is always an action of all three, and yet whenever God is at work it is still possible to distinguish the work of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit. Look at our beautiful wall mural of the baptism of Christ for example. **How is the Trinity at work here?** God creates the world and everything in it sends his Son Jesus to restore it. All is by God the Father's hand (note hand). God the father's voice comes down from heavens saying this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. Jesus is Himself God's Word come down from heaven. He loves and obeys the Father, and leads humankind back to God through his baptism (crucifixion & resurrection). The Holy Spirit descends as visual manifestation of the continuing presence of the father's love for the son and the son's love for the father, in which to this day we continue "to live, move and have our being." Acts 17:28. All working and flowing together, but all distinct as in a beautiful dance.
10. This is what is meant by the image peri-choresis, that this interpenetrating dance of God's person's happens in God always, and as we will see next time, in the believer as well. The other thing about peri-choresis is that, in popular theology at least, it came to mean, circle-

dance, as in a joyous dancing around each other of the Trinity. Think about that metaphor, those of you who like to do our Armenian circle dance. **How is a circle dance a great metaphor for this interworking, equal, flowing, many and one nature of God?**

- Well everyone is an individual, but holding hands as one
- You can't go solo wherever you want, but if you don't do your part, the whole thing bunches up
- There is really no head to a true circle dance-no hierarchy-all equally important
- Because united, no competition or domination- interact in a way that gives life to you & other

11. Ok, so peri-choresis helps us understand how the three persons of God flow forward and interpenetrate each other. There is no hierarchy; all are equally important, equally present, all in harmony as individual and unity.

TRINITY AS HARMONY

12. The final analogy is a musical one and needs Louise's help to demonstrate. The trinity is like a musical chord let's say a C major chord (please play Louise). You hear and experience this chord all at one in one piece. But the chord is made up of three distinct notes, C, E, G, (Louise play separately) the 1st, 3rd and 5th notes of the c scale, and if you train your ear just a little, you can hear each of these even as you hear the whole chord. You might say that these notes interpenetrate each other in a "peri-choretic" dance, so that whenever you hear a c chord you hear the three notes and at same time the chord. And we could go more on this analogy. There is no hierarchy of the notes, you can play them in any order, yet it is always the 1st/tonic note that determines the nature of the chord, then the 5th note or dominant is directly determined by the tonic. The third note seems third in importance but it colors the whole chord. This is just like the trinity, the Father tonic, determines the son, and the Holy Spirit flows between both expressing the love of the father and son as the third harmonizes between the 1st and 5th.

THE IDOLATRY OF AN IMPERSONAL GOD

13. Ok so back now to our question of "Who is God," vs. "What is God" and why knowing the Trinity, the personal God is so important. A key consequence of God revealing God's self as trinity is to remind us always that God is not alone, God is not an abyss of impersonal greatness that destroys relationships and personality. God is love and embodies that love in communion with God's self and with us.

14. Put in the language we have focused on, knowing God only as a "What" and not enough as a "Who" has gotten humankind into much trouble, and has greatly stunted individual maturity with God. First let's think about it on the grand stage, let's go back over the worst chapters of history in our heads; the Spanish Inquisition, Puritan witch hunts in America, Muslim conquest historically and extremism now. The one thing they all hold in common is this heretical understanding of an impersonal God, a God that is all mighty, all powerful, all truthful-but all of this impersonal. As with all great sins, it is a truth that is twisted. God is indeed all mighty, all powerful and all truthful-but God is also "all-personal," if we can say this.

15. Maybe you can intuit why leaving out the “who” of God for the “what” is so dangerous. If God is all powerful and right, but not personal, it becomes very easy for humans to put God in their pocket. God has given his power and truth, we know it, and you will surrender to God’s truth or die. But God does not give his truth, God is his truth. God is personal to God’s core, God relates with individuals on a personal level without intermediaries. So God can never be just a what, i.e. “judgement,” God can only be the judge, first the judge of you and with no need for you to step in-also the direct judge of whoever we would persecute as sinner. Taking away God’s personality is the ultimate form of idolatry because we always put our own personality (ego), or our tribe or country’s personality in God’s place, which is the definition of the first and ultimate sin; idolatry.
16. And this idolatry and blasphemy, by the way, doesn’t just pop up in grand scale at terrible times in history and go away like the plague. It is always with us and screws up your and my spiritual life every day. How? Well think about your relationship to God. You may think of your God as judgement, and therefore church and worship with him is all about ridding yourself of guilt and trying to feel better. You may think about God as truth, and so doing the words and motions of badarak the right way makes you feel good. But your God is too small. More precisely your God is too impersonal.
17. God is not a judgement and God is not a performance. God is a person, who therefore should at least be as real to you as the closest people to you in your life, your parents, your child, your spouse, your dear friend. At least, because God is of course much more than human in his being, and much more than one person, God is three persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So you see talking about the Trinity and asking “who” God is, is an essential corrective to a tendency that we all have deep in our sinful human nature; to not see and know God personally. The Trinity reminds us that neither God, no anyone is greater than the personal, to the contrary, God is so much person, that you can’t fit God into just one, God is, if you will super-personal. This allows God to know you and I better than we know ourselves, and to deal with us with much more love and patience than is humanly possible.

WHAT PRACTICAL DIFFERENCE DOES THE TRINITY MAKE-TRANSITION TO NEXT TIME

18. Ok so this is pretty mind-blowing, and this was a lot of theology for one day. In conclusion, I just want to leave a preview for next week’s final session on the Trinity where we will ask the question of “what practical difference does it make in our lives that God is Trinity.”
19. Well I think it makes all the difference that those trying to follow God, come to know God in Trinity, because the Trinity suggests an answer to perhaps to one of the most difficult and frequently occurring question of life; how to at once be your full individual self, while at the same time being united as part of a greater group. Think about how hard that is. Think about how everything in life and in your life is a struggle to do just this; to be fully yourself, while at the same time being intimately with others. Getting this question right makes for happy, teams, workplace, marriages, families, countries and churches, getting it wrong has been the original sin of humankind which continues to cause us all much suffering to this day.