
Blessed by God Our Creator

Genesis 2:15-25

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Northway Christian Church – Dallas, Texas

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St. Patrick was not Irish. In fact, he was Roman, born in Scotland, or maybe even Wales. His first trip to Ireland, when he was 15 or 16 years old, was actually against his will. You see, St. Patrick was kidnapped by the Celts. For several years they held him captive in Ireland, working him as a slave. After his escape, he studied for the priesthood, and then in a dream St. Patrick heard the voice of his captors crying out to him to “*come hither and walk with us once more.*” And so it was that St. Patrick went back to Ireland, this time not as a slave but as a Christian missionary. And despite constant threats and untold hardship, St. Patrick succeeded in converting most of Ireland to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And his most effective tool in this work proved to be the shamrock.

At first the Irish had great difficulty understanding what St. Patrick meant when he talked about God as a trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. And so, plucking a shamrock from the ground, St. Patrick showed his Irish audience how something could in fact be three-in-one, and it’s said that in that moment their resistance to the Christian idea of a triune God was almost immediately and completely overcome

Today, the doctrine of the Trinity remains one of the more mysterious and mystifying things that the church believes and proclaims. Broken down into its constituent parts, the historic doctrine of the Trinity affirms seven Biblical truths (columbia.edu)–

1. There is only one God;
2. The Father is God;
3. And Jesus is God;
4. And the Holy Spirit is God;
5. But Jesus is not the Father;
6. And Jesus is not the Holy Spirit;
7. And the Holy Spirit is not the Father.

And how the church put all this together was to say that “*there are three persons in One God – not that there are three aspects of one God, or three changing roles, but three distinct persons who are nevertheless One Essence*” (Stramara). Any questions?

Because it's not just the Irish who have trouble understanding what this means, it's become a standard practice of the church to look for analogies to help people understand how something can be three-in-one –

- *Ice, steam and a bottle of Ozraka are all H₂O;*
- *In a flame you can see red, yellow and blue;*
- *I'm a father, a son and a brother;*
- *There are neutrons, protons and electrons in an atom;*
- *An egg has a shell, the white and a yolk;*
- *The mind consists of intellect, memory and will;*
- *As human beings we are a unity of body, soul and spirit;*
- *This sermon involves thought, words and speech;*
- *The dimensions of an object are its length, height and width;*
- *The Sun provides light, heat and gravitational pull;*
- *The universes consists of space, time and matter;*
- *An apple has its skin, its meat and its seeds.*

And many Christians have found such comparisons helpful. They establish some useful categories for thinking about how something can be Trinitarian. In fact, I've used them myself, both in my believing and in my teaching. And because I have, I must warn you that they will only take you so far.

Bill Baird, one of my favorite professors when I was a student at Brite Divinity School, used to say that God is not an object to be examined but a person to be known. We can't, and we shouldn't, ignore the demands of our minds for understanding; but in doing so, we must never forget that the heart has its claim on us too. Just as falling in love is a dance of your head and your heart, so is coming to faith. Analogies cannot prove the Trinity to us beyond a reasonable doubt, but they can prepare us for an encounter with the Trinity that is absolutely convincing.

My spiritual world was turned upside down on the day I discovered that behind all of the church's talk about God there really was a God. You see, scripture and tradition are not ends in themselves, but they are means to an end, namely a relationship with the living, loving God. Theologian Karl Barth talked about the curiosity that comes over us when we see somebody on a street corner suddenly stop and gaze intently into the sky (62). It makes us want to stop and look up too. And Barth said that this is the purpose of Scripture. The Bible is not an encyclopedia of information, but an invitation to an experience. It is not a relic of devotion, but a map for the journey of faith. And so it is that reading and thinking about the Trinity has merit, but only if it ushers us into the presence of the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

John Fletcher was John Wesley's successor as the spiritual leader of the Methodist Church. And one of the things he taught was that the Christian experience of God ordinarily follows a sequential path (Alexander 102). We first encounter God as our Creator, and then we get introduced to God as our Redeemer, and finally we discover that we live, and move and have our being as Christians in God who is our Sustainer and Sanctifier. N. Graham Standish, a

Presbyterian pastor in Pennsylvania, suggests that today each one of these three experiences of God have become the prized possession of a different stream of Christianity (50).

We in the mainline church claim God the Father, and sometimes Mother. We own the experience of God as the Creator; it's how we prefer to think and talk – just listen to our prayers. Evangelicals have claimed God the Son. They own the experience of God the Redeemer; it's how they think and talk – “*Are you saved?*” And Pentecostals and Charismatics can have God the Holy Spirit! They own the experience of God as the indwelling and empowering presence, and most of us don't even mind. Isn't this a sorry arrangement? We've divvied-up God, and settled for just a part of the three-in-one, when Biblically we are invited to the fullness of a Trinitarian experience with God – as our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

As you will recall from my message two weeks ago, this October here at Northway we are going to be counting our blessings, we are going to be taking a closer look at what God has done for us. Spiritually, this starts us down that triune path where we are invited to experience God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And personally, I find that I experience God the Father when I take the time to look at creation.

In recent years, I find that it is increasingly in green pastures and beside still waters that my soul gets restored. You see, as good and as helpful as were the community and the school at the monastery in Pecos on my Sabbatical during the past two summers, I've got to tell you that it was the Sangre de Cristo Mountains and the Pecos River that had as much to do with my spiritual renewal as anything else. Sitting beside that running water, in the shade of those tall trees, in the shadow of that ancient range helped me to “*clear the chaos and the clutter*” so that I could “*see the things that really matter, be at peace and simply be.*” God the Creator waits to meet us in nature, and His hands are full of wonderful gifts.

John Stott has written about what he calls “*God's creation gifts,*” those blessings that God bestows on us regardless of whether or not we ask for them, and whether or not we're grateful for them (187). This is what the story of the Creation that we heard read this morning from Genesis chapter 2 meant when it talked about the Garden filled with good things for our use and delight. These gifts are not just offered to people of faith; they are offered to all who draw breath. Beauty, bread and our bodies are gifts that make life possible and meaningful. These creation gifts are tokens of God's great affection for us and are supposed to function as triggers that alert us to our deep need for Him. God the Creator fills our hands with good things. But even more importantly, God the Creator fills our lives with purpose.

In the film version of Paul Theroux's novel, The Mosquito Coast, the son of the madcap inventor who has made it his life's work to make ice in the jungle, explains his father's theology to a new friend, the daughter of a missionary.

“Strictly speaking, there's no such thing as invention,” he said. “It's just magnifying what already exists. Father often talks about things being

revealed. That's true invention, he said. Revealing something's use, and magnifying it. Discovering its imperfections and improving it... putting it to work for you." And then the boy explained, "Father believes that God has left the world incomplete, and that it's our job to figure out how it works, to tinker with it and to finish it."

You see, delight is just not enough for us as human beings; we need a sense of direction too. Pleasure is welcome and certainly has its place in this life; but we will not last long if that's all there is. We need a purpose. We are "meaning-mongers" as human beings; we are "captivated and motivated" by significance. And so in the story of Creation found in Genesis chapter 2 we are told that humanity was put in the garden not just to enjoy it, but "to till it and keep it" as well. Theologians refer to this as "the cultural mandate." And what that means is that God invites us into a partnership of creativity, contribution and conservation with Himself. Of all God's creation gifts, perhaps none is more precious than the dignity of being invited to be God's co-creators.

The Bible and the church both proclaim the foundational truth that God the Father is the Maker of the heavens and the earth. And where we experience this truth is in the blessings of Creation. The experience of God the Father is an experience of the blessings of Creation – beauty and bounty; purpose and power; abundance and attentiveness. So, have you given any thought lately to just how blessed you are by God the Father? John Dawson writes –

The truth is that God is innately generous. Creation shows an extravagance of color, complexity, and design that goes far beyond simple functional value. At this moment, high in the Italian Alps, a tiny white flower glistens in the sunlight. It has never been seen by the human eye in all of its seasons of bloom. It is not an essential part of the food chain. It was created by God in the hope that one day a son of Adam or a daughter of Eve might glance at it and be blessed by its beauty. (www.lastdaysministries.org)

And this week I want to invite you into the experience of God the Father by doing precisely that – by glancing at the beauty of our creation and being blessed by it. You see, faith is not meant to be just a matter of the head; it's supposed to be just as much a matter of the heart. So, count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done.

SOURCES

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