

God the Father

Today I am going to begin a series on the Trinity. I'm not sure why, but I thought three would be a good number of sermons to preach on this topic – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Three in One ... the Trinity.

Today we are going to have time to consider the first aspect of the Trinity – God the Father. It shouldn't be too difficult to describe and define God I wouldn't think! By the end of this message you should have a clear, indisputable definition of who and how God is, folded nicely and put in a tidy box, and wrapped up with a bow.

There are days when I think how satisfying and comforting that would be. But I have not had those kinds of days for a very long time. There was a time when if you asked me the who's, and how's and when's and where's and why's of God, well I would have a quick clear, black and white answer for you and it would be the final word on the topic. But sadly that did not endure. No thanks to education and life experience, I

gradually, and reluctantly moved to the understanding that God was not so easily kept captive in that lovely little box.

I want you to think back to when you were a child. How might you have described God? If someone had asked you back then, to draw a picture of God, what would your picture look like? Would your description and your picture of God today be the same as when you were a child? How has your picture of God changed over the years? Would you even be able to draw a picture of how you now understand God?

Some may ask, why any of this is even important. Philosophers and theologians believe that the quest for God is intrinsic to human nature because it is the quest for meaning, for the purpose of our existence. It is a search for the mysterious, transcendent **Other**, who is the source of our existence and the ultimate answer to humanity's craving for meaning. The quest for God is within us. It is a quest to find meaning and purpose.

Here's a big \$5.00 word for you – **Anthropomorphism**. Do you know what that means?

Think of Bugs Bunny, or Winnie the Pooh, or the Little Engine that Could? Do you have a dog to whom you speak? Do you assume they understand you? Do you think the way they look at you, that they are speaking to you? That is anthropomorphism – the attribution of human characteristics, emotions, and behaviors to cartoon characters, animals or other non-human things. Some of you have I am sure, spoken to the odd golf club that has let you down! Giving human qualities or characteristics to non-human entities.

Remember your childhood description and drawing of God?

Anthropomorphic I am sure ... something with human qualities I would guess ... perhaps a grandfather type, long hair and beard – it is not easy to shake loose from that image.

So with the benefit of some education and life experience, what can we say about the nature of God?

Let's see what some theologians have to say and see if you agree.

Two words are often heard in religious circles ... **Omnipotent** and **Omnipresence**.

Omnipotent means able to do anything, unlimited power. Would you say that your description of God includes omnipotence?

Omnipresence means everywhere at the same time. Can your understanding of God include the concept of omnipresence?

Listen to poor Job when trying to understand God – “Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than the heaven – Deeper than Sheol – Its measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea.” The Omnipresence of God. God is everywhere at the same time. Can you draw a picture of that?

Listen to these descriptions of God and see if you agree. Do you find any of what I am going to say objectionable?

There is one God who created the universe. God is unchanging. God is an active and personal presence in the world, linked in an everlasting relationship with all of humanity.

God is all good. God exists throughout the universe. God is all forgiving, compassionate, and all powerful.

God has many names ... Allah, Elohim from the Arabic language, Yahweh, Jehovah.

Every person can have a personal relationship with God. God is at work in the world and affects everything we do.

There is one true God who has come to us and entered into a covenant with us. In God, we live and move and have our being.

Do you agree with these descriptions, these qualities of God?

Would it surprise you to learn that these descriptions for God come from Jewish, Muslim and Christian theology?

The first chapter of the Book of John says this –

¹“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

How do you draw a picture of that? In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God. There is, and I believe it is because of the limitations of early language development, an ascription of gender to John’s description of God. Through **him** all things were made. In **him** was life. **Anthropomorphism**. Ascribing gender to the Creator of the Universe and thereby ascribing human qualities.

I remember for the first time hearing a minister proclaim that God is **Mystery**. I was not prepared to hear that and I did not like that one bit.

I knew everything there was to know about God and had him beautifully enclosed in a lovely little box, all tied up with a golden ribbon. Mystery? How can I be friends with Mystery? How can I worship and serve Mystery? Once we ascribe human qualities to my dog or Bugs Bunny, or Winnie the Pooh, and most of all God, how can I ever understand them any other way?

It is good to go back again and again to this opening passage of John.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. The light of all mankind. The light that shines in the darkness.”

Later on in the Book of John, Philip says, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Isn't that all any of us want ... to actually see God ... not just in the wonder of His creation, or the comfort of His Holy Spirit, or the

compassion of one person to another, but to actually see God, just as Philip was brave enough to ask? Don't you want that?

⁹ Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you for such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

Well at least the disciples had Jesus, right there in the flesh! Something tangible, visible, they could hear him and see him and have meals with him and travel with him. He was in God and God was in Him!!

And all we are left with is Mystery!

And so we are left to rely on this thing we call faith ... believing in things we cannot see, or touch, or hear.

It is this mustard seed of faith that helps us to believe, along with our Jewish and Islamic brothers and sisters, that God is **Omniscient** and **Omnipresent**. Over all things, and in all things, able to do anything.

Above and beyond us and within us and beside us. That God is all good, all powerful, compassionate, and forgiving, unchanging, and longing to be in relationship with us.

Next week we are going to consider the nature of Jesus Christ and following that the Holy Spirit. We do not share these entities with our Jewish and Islamic brothers and sisters. We call it the Trinity ... three in one, the Triune God.

May God bless you as you seek to grow in your relationship with the One who is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega.

Amen.