**We are Relationally Loved by a Relational God**

Hey everyone, my name is Josh for those of you who don’t know me. Today I am going to be preaching on the Trinity. Let me tell you a little about myself. I just graduated from college, I’m originally from the Scandinavian state of Minnesota and I am the oldest of 6 kids. Which means I have a lot of experience with babies. Babies are great, but they are completely selfish. when they want something they want it now, and they don't hesitate to let their parents know. And, although they love their parents, they love them for what they get from them. They are also almost completely ignorant and unaware of the feelings of their parents. They know that their parents love them, but they don't know the pain that their mother went through in childbirth, the long hours the father works to prepare for the baby, and the sleepless nights that both of them go through soothing he or she to sleep. Nor do they comprehend the complexity of their parents’ relationship or their love for one another. and although the baby is able to love their parents, the baby has no comprehension through the intensity and liveliness of the parents’ love for their child. But when they get older, they learn and begin to understand their parents more. And even when they find out that their parents are not the perfect, ever-loving providers of their infancy, they begin to love them more and more as they are. So that by the end, the child's love is mature and more keenly felt for their parents. This is kind of like my experience with the doctrine of the Trinity. It was something that I kind of understood and I knew I believed, but it didn’t grab my heart. I didn’t get why it was so important and thought that thinking about it too much would just lead to a lot of head knowledge.

That is a lot of new Christian’s (and older Christians) experience with the Trinity. when they first get saved they know that God loves them and they love God and they love Jesus Christ. The majority of them know that Jesus is in fact God or at least the Son of God. however, the Trinity is some kind of vague concept that you know you have to believe in order to be a Christian but you don't really understand it or experience it in your daily Christian walk. And that is really understandable. The doctrine of the Trinity can be confusing, weird, and otherworldly. In fact, some of you might be thinking to yourself, “I don’t even know what you mean by the word “Trinity.” Well, I am going to talk about the Trinity today! I am going to spend a little time talking about what we mean when we when we use the word “Trinity.” but the majority of this sermon I am going to spend talking about how the Trinity increases our understanding and experience of God's grace in our lives.

**The Doctrine of the Trinity**

In fact, where we are in The Story fits perfectly with this topic. Especially because in the Old Testament, we get some hint at the Trinity, but primarily it emphasizes the oneness of God. Every young Israelite after the Egyptian Exodus would have Deut. 6:4 which says, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” drilled in their head. it isn’t until we get the New Testament, with the coming of Christ, that the person of Jesus begins to unravel for us the mystery of the Trinity. the Old Testament saints knew that God was One and Elijah, David, and Jeremiah would have had that hammered in their heads that there was only one God. but then throughout the New Testament we get examples of the titles and work of God being attributed to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Not only that, we notice that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit seem to have their own personhood. For example, what did Pastor John talk about last week? he talked about the baptism of Jesus. and what happened at the baptism of Jesus? We see the father speaking to the Son and the Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove. Here we see 3 persons who at some point in Scripture are called God doing three different things. This, and many other examples like it, are the reason that Christians throughout history have believed in the Trinity.

**Definition**

A simple definition of the Trinity is the belief that there is only one God but He exists as three Persons. People use other terms such as one essence, one being, or one substance in three Persons, and they are all right. But all they mean is that Christians worship one God who exists as three Persons.

**What it is Not**

Now it is also important to note what the Trinity does not mean. Christians don’t believe that there are three different gods that are also three different persons, like the Mormons do. Nor do we believe that there is one God who is only one person like in Islam, or like the Oneness Pentecostals who believe that God is only one person who has a title or a mask that he wears of father, a title as son and a title as a spirit. All of these other views are unbiblical.

**What it is**

According to the Scriptures, the Father is 100% God, the Son is 100% God, and the Holy Spirit is 100% God. At the same time, the Father is a different person than the Son, the Son is a different person than the Spirit, and the Spirit is a different person than the Father. Now, we could talk about the exact specifics on how the Trinity works and why Christians have read the Bible that way for hours. But I don’t think that is the best use of our time and I want us to get to actually looking at some verses. Also, I want you to cultivate a love for God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and an awareness of the immense glory of the Trinity, and then a desire to study the theology behind it will follow. Specifically, I am going to talk about how **we are relationally loved by a relational God**, and how that significantly affects how we receive God’s love and how we love others.

**God is Love**

So first of all, almost all of you know that, according to 1 John 4:8, God is love. Which means that part of what essentially makes God, God, is that He is infinitely loving. But that means that God always needed to have something or someone to love in order to be who He is! So is that why he created us? Did he create us so that we could be the thing that He loved? Well, the Trinity helps us answer that question!

**God Loves God**

1. The Father loves the Son

Listen to what Jesus prays to the Father in John 17:24,

* ***“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.” ...***

So who is it that the Father is loving before Creation? Its Jesus, the Son of God!

2. The Son loves the Father

Not only that, John 14:31 Jesus says,

* ***“but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father…”***

3. The Spirit loves the Son

And then we see that the Spirit loves the Son because when He is given to the Church, Jesus says in John 16:14 that,

* ***“He (the Spirit of Truth in the context) will glorify me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you.”***

So the Holy Spirit shows His love for the Son by making Him look precious, and magnifying the beauty and greatness of Jesus. These verses show that the reason why God is love is because God loves God. For all eternity past the Father, the Son, and the Spirit were loving each other. Since all of time and before time they have been completely happy, joyous, and excited with one another. We serve a God who is intensely relational. Imagine the best relationship you have ever seen and multiply that by infinity and that won’t scratch the surface of the love and joy the three Persons of the Trinity share with one another.

**We were made to love God**

1. We were made in God’s image to love

Now you and I were made to be relational also, and to love and love deeply! This is because we were made in the image of the relational God. In Genesis 1:26-27 during the week of Creation God says,

* ***“Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness… So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”***

Please notice how the first part, “let US make man in Our image, after Our likeness.” Why would it say that if there was not multiple Persons in the being of God? It was in the image of the relational God that we as human beings were created. This means that just as God loves God, we were made to love God and have relationship with Him.

2. The Fall distorts our ability to love

But because of Adam’s sin, everything got screwed up to the point that, as Romans 3:23 says

***“all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”***

Because of this we became strangers to God and we became his enemies. When sin entered the world, all of mankind - me, you, and you and the rest of us - became opposers and haters of the one who made us to love Him. Instead of our hearts being pointed lovingly and relationally towards God. Our hearts became inverted and twisted so that, through loving other things more than God, we have directed our love towards ourselves in a crooked and deformed way.

3. Higher Power

Alcoholics Anonymous and other addiction recovery programs have a good way of expressing this truth. You see when someone is addicted to alcohol, pornography, or food, they build an imaginary self-world in order to escape from dealing with reality and relating with those around them. This is ultimately because the person has allowed themselves to become selfish. Part of any recovery program is getting outside that world of imagination and escape, and engage the real world. Part of accomplishing this is focusing your energies on serving others and relying on your Higher Power.

As Christians, we know that the true Higher Power is the God of the Bible. And the God of the Bible who exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He has provided us a way to escape our twisted self-love. When Christ died on the cross, He killed the enmity between us and God and took the punishment for our sin.

* As Romans 5:10 says, ***“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”***

So, through Christ, our relationship with God is restored. We ceased to be enemies and we were reconciled to God. Not only were we made for relationship by a relational God, we are relationally loved by a relational God. Those of us in this Church that have been born again and have come to put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ are brought into the love of the Trinity.

**We Loved by the Trinity**

Let me explain what I mean -

We already went over that the Father loves the Son to an unending degree, but in John 15:9 Jesus proclaims that,

***“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.***”

Do you see what’s amazing about this verse? Jesus is saying that if you are a believer, He loves you as much, and no less, than as the Father loves the Son! Jesus cannot love you anymore than he does right now because he already loves you the way the Father loves Him. We see here that we are relationally loved by the relational God to the highest degree possible. Us - you and I - sinful human beings, are loved by God with the same love that God loves God! And then Jesus commands us to abide (aka rest, live, remain) in his infinite love. And not only does the Son love us this way… the Father does as well!

Jesus promises us in John 16:27 that

* ***“the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.”***

And then later he goes on to pray to the Father in John 17:23 that the Church would be so united that -

* ***“they may be perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you have loved me.*”**

Not only does Jesus love the us the way the Father loves Him, the Father loves us the way he loves the Son! It gets even better, we as believers are so relationally loved by our relational God that the Father puts His love inside of us! The final verse in John 17(:26) goes on to say that,

* ***“I have made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”***

So God’s love is literally put inside of our souls. How does God do this?... Why the Holy Spirit of course! In Romans 5:5 Paul says,

* ***“And hope does not disappoint, for the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”***

**This is key to how we understand the Gospel and our relationship with the Lord for two reasons.**

**1. We are loved to the Max**

We know that we are relationally loved by a relational God to the max. Not only does Jesus love us, the Father and the Spirit also love us completely. We are welcomed into the love that the three persons have toward one another. If you aren’t feeling the impact of this, picture this: you are locked out and not invited to a party, and not just any party, this party has all the joy, fun, and excitement of Christmas, a wedding, a bar mitzvah, and a thanksgiving dinner combined. While you are sitting outside and you hear the party going on inside, all the sudden, the guests of honor open the door and welcome you inside and sit you right next them at the head table... right at the center of the excitement and fellowship of the party. That is somewhat of a dim picture of what it means to be welcomed into the love and joy of the Trinity. We have been brought in as full participants into the love that God has for God since all of time. We are wrapped up on all sides and baptized into the intense joy of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is basically a tri-ambush of love.

**2.** **God’s love de-inverts our hearts**

Although our rebellion against God is forgiven because of the cross, our hearts are still turned inward towards ourselves. And we still find ourselves trapped in our self-love. When someone gets saved, not only is their sins forgiven, the love of God, through the Holy Spirit, comes crashing into their souls like an avalanche of pure affection. What this means for the Christian life is that even though our heart is still turned in on itself, the Spirit of God bends our heart to point our affections, our joys, and our love towards God. We now have the power of God to relationally love the relational God. Or in other words, just as God eternally loves God, as one Christian leader puts it, “it takes God to love God.” So God gives us His love to love Him back with.

**Application**

So how do we live in light of the fact that we are relationally loved by a relational God? Here are some of things that I thought of?

1. **Make an effort love your fellow brothers and sisters more authentically.**

* The love of the Triune God being poured into your heart should change the way that you love fellow believers
* In John 13:34 Jesus commands, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another”
* Make a point to say something good about another believer who you don’t like very much when they are not around. Complimenting them face to face can be flattery, but positive comments behind their backs overturns the spirit of gossip in the heart.

1. **Get serious about loving your enemies -**

* Just as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit sought us out, we who were enemies of God, and welcomed us into the fellowship of the Trinity, we too should seek to actively show love and be reconciled to our enemies.
* This involves praying for them, like Matt. 5:44 commands, as if you were praying for yourself. So don’t just pray for their salvation, pray that the Lord would bless their family, keep them safe from sickness, give them joy in life, AND that the Lord would make them a child of God.

1. **Develop deeper intellectual and devotional affections for the Trinity** -

* One of the best ways to sustain a living and active love for the Trinity is to make sure the doctrine is a regular part of your spiritual life.
* Read good books on the Trinity, there are a lot of them, for example “Delighting in the Trinity” by Michael Reeves.
* Find more worship songs for your personal devotions that highlight the glory of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
* Ask God to show you more of who He is and what it means to worship a God who is Trinity. Ask God to make your heart love the Trinity more and to transform the way you think about Him. I promise you, he will start doing it.

Now you may have a lot of questions after this sermon about the Trinity and how to understand the doctrine, or maybe you are wondering where we get the doctrine of the Trinity from Scripture I want to tell you that I would love to talk to after the service, and I know a number of other people in the Church, including Pastor John, Pastor Eric, and Pastor Jesse who would definitely be able to explain things as well but I want to leave off with this exhortation:

**Conclusion**

If we as a Church do things like this to live in light of the fact that we are relationally loved by a relational God our relationships with one another will become vitally important. Serving and loving God can no longer just be a personal thing. It must be active and engaging with the Church as a whole. Our small groups will make more efforts to authentically love one another and our enemies will notice that we have a love for them that could only come from the pouring out of the Spirit into our hearts. So let's take joy in the Trinity and enjoy the riches of who God is as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**Communion Intro**

And as we take Communion in a little bit, let's remember and dwell on the reality that the God of love has welcomed us to his table to commune and eat with Him. And that because of Jesus and the blood that He shed on the cross, we can have a joyous relationship with our deeply relational God.