

Who is God?

Matthew 28:16-20

A Sermon for Trinity Sunday

Today, Trinity Sunday, marks the end of the festival season in the church, the first festival is the first Sunday of Advent, six months ago, and the last festival was last Sunday, Pentecost, the festival of the Holy Spirit.

Just think: There is no festival for God the Father, the Maker of heaven and earth.

But there is Trinity Sunday, today. And the question for today is: Who is God? Or, really: Who is the TRUE God? How do we figure that out?

When we think about it, we realize there is all kinds of stuff out there about figuring out God. The major way people think about figuring out God is that God must be that great “X” in the sky, the great unknown, and then people have different ideas and views, but really, it’s “X,” like in algebra, only there’s no way to solve the equation. So, we end up in the unknown, the unseen, the invisible.

If you take a survey of the people around the country, asking if they believe in God, about 90-95% will say: “Yes, I believe in God!”

But that doesn’t mean that they believe in the God of the Old and New Testaments. How do we sort that out?

Commonly speaking, we have the idea that there is a sort of godness out there—a big unknown. And then some have this much of it, or that much of it.

This can be seen in our conversations with people of the Jewish religion.

When we talk with them, we have the temptation to say: “We both have what we call the Old Testament. And then we Christians have also God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. So, we’re 1/3rd together with you, the Jewish people.”

And the Jewish people say: “Wait a minute. The God Yahweh is the only God, and you can’t add on to that.” Nor is this a matter of the same thing, but a different style or taste, like I drive a Toyota and you drive Honda. Not at all.

When they use the Old Testament, they use it very differently from the way we do. And they know Hebrew very well, so the problem isn’t be solved by knowing Hebrew.

Secondly, as we look at Islam, we see that they believe in one God, named Allah. And there’s the temptation to say they believe in God their way, and we believe in God our way.

And if you talk with them, they will say: “Wait a minute. There’s one true God and that’s not that Jewish God. It’s only Allah.”

And then there’s the temptation to go along because they will say: “Of course, in the Koran Jesus is mentioned, Mary as well. We honor Jesus as a great prophet. Of course, he isn’t as great as Mohammed, but he was a great prophet.”

And we’ll say: “Wait a minute. No, he’s God.” At which point they would quickly counter with: “No, he’s not. That’s idolatry. You Christians have it wrong.”

So, when we have this general idea of God and say well, really religions are mostly all the same when you get behind them.” But it doesn’t work out that way.

When we think about who is God, we say God is all powerful and all wise and we take all the good characteristics we have and lift them to the infinite degree. We have some wisdom so we lift that to the infinite degree and say God is all wise.

We know that we’re caught in the world of change, but God is the one who is infinite and perfect. Not subject to change and decay. So, we take whatever we value and project it onto the heavens as the divine, the superhuman.

But that, of course, doesn’t tell the story at all.

One of my favorite hymns is “Immortal, invisible, God only wise.” It talks about God as immortal, unchanging, and all the rest. The trouble with this hymn is that it’s so singable, but some of its phrases are a bit off. It says that God is unknown, hidden in light, unchanging.

But that’s not the God of the New Testament, and yet we sing it and absorb what it says because it’s so singable.

With that, the evil one sneaks in and says: “There are all these different religions, and all these different views, and who knows?”

And that brings us to the false god of today who hovers like a fog over us, the god of “who knows?” This false god pressures you and me into polite indifference about ultimate matters and into thinking that all that matters is whatever works for each one personally. The main thing is being sincere and helping others.

In this fog of who knows, the evil one sneaks in and says: “We’ve got to be doing things that are needed here today, and we’ll deal with that later.”

The voice of that tempter whispers in our ear: “Later, when you’re ready to die, you can deal with that. But in the meantime, you don’t need to deal with that.”

Behind that temptation is the mistaken view that everybody is going to be saved anyway so it doesn't matter, each in his own way, his own conviction, his own sincerity because God is that unknown "X," and that's all we can say, all we can do.

Over against all that comes the Gospel.

It's not that we figure God out but that God figures us out. And that's a different kind of thing. It's because he is Lord and he is Lord of everything; he is the Creator, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Who is like God? There is nothing to compare him with because he is the Lord, and he does things his way and differently. Thank God! Not our way.

What we're looking at from the first Sunday in Advent (December) to Pentecost (end of May) is the Lord who is different from all other gods and all other claims to be God.

All other religions are human ways of making sense of life. But this is the One who comes and does it his way. We look at what he's done in the past, what he's doing now, and of course, what he is going to do in the future. He is the one who is in charge.

And then comes Trinity Sunday and the question: What about this Trinity?

Are there three godheads (Matthew 28:19-20, Tritheism, no unity)? Or three phases of God? It's a puzzle. How does it work? How could it be that one was truly God and truly human at the same time?

The church struggled with this for about 500 years because the whole thing is about salvation. Those 500 years after Jesus lived and the Bible are there to point out that he had to be truly God to SAVE us and he has to be truly human to save US.

And the witness of the Bible and those 500 years of hammering out the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed are about is keeping this in front of us—he was truly God to SAVE us and truly human to save US—so we don't go off in other directions thinking: Was it entirely this or really that?

The Trinity is about salvation.

Again though, the evil one sneaks in to say: "Don't be so serious. Who knows?"

But we remind ourselves that sin, death, and the devil are all the same thing.

The devil creeps in and says: "Don't think of that. Sin is not that serious. I mean, not really. Death, well, you can deal with that later. And the devil, well, he doesn't really exist, does he? Who knows?"

When we listen to that, we miss out on salvation entirely.

What then is this glorious Gospel? It is that the Lord in Jesus Christ on the cross has done it all, and that this is salvation for you and me, and there is, as it says in the Book of Acts, no other name under heaven by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12).

And out of that the pay-off today for you and me in this place where we are is that we have certainty of salvation.

I don't know what happens to other people who don't know the Gospel. That's God's problem.

But we have the promise and the promise of God is certain, and what he has done is certain, and that is something we can have because he has done this for us.

And because we have certainty, we have freedom, the freedom truly to be who we are, free to be you and me.

Of course, the evil one again creeps in and says: "But think of your to-do list back home, of all the chores and things that need to be done."

To all that we say: "Back off. Let it wait." There only one important event in all of history, and that is what the Lord has done. It changes everything. It brings us together here in this sanctuary to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, the holiness of his cross and resurrection.

Amen