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*Genesis 1:1-2, 26-27 (NIV 84)*

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### The Trinity Still Matters

What did you think when you saw the cover of the bulletin today? Did those words "Holy Trinity" give you a sinking feeling? "Oh, no! We're in for another long, doctrinal sermon!"? If you did, I can't deny that you may be on to something. I did a quick computer search of my sermons this week and I discovered that I mention the Trinity a lot. But I hope you don't tune out as soon as you realize that's today's topic because the doctrine of the Trinity matters. We live in an age when most people don't see the point of this kind of teaching. When you hear that the Christian Church literally spent centuries studying and defining and yes, arguing about this teaching, you might think that just shows what was wrong with the Christian Church in the past. But even in this modern, ecumenical, non-doctrinal age, **the Trinity still matters.** The teaching about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit lies at the center of our faith.

#### I.

The Bible begins with the teaching about the Trinity. The first two verses of the Bible say, "**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.**" The Bible begins with God. That opening sentence describes what the one true God did. He created heaven and earth. That's how God began time and space. He created the universe. But at that moment when it all began, it was all "formless and empty." It wasn't finished yet. God chose to create a kind of beginning soup, if you will. Then God spent the next six days refining and perfecting the creation he had made. But "in the beginning" God showed us who he is and why he matters. He's the God who can call things into existence from nothing. All that we make, we make out of something else. God did do that, too, later. But he began by creating the universe out of nothing.

And even before he did that, he thought of it. He designed the universe. Throughout all of recorded history, we human beings have struggled to understand what God made. In science class, our children learn that the earth revolves around the sun, but its orbit is not a perfect circle. It's an egg shaped path called an ellipse. So half the year the earth is closer to the sun and half the year, it's farther away. But guess when the earth is closer to the sun, winter or summer? It's not summer. The earth is actually closer to the sun in winter, at least, for us here in the northern hemisphere. I tell you what, you can argue that point with my mom until you're blue in the face and she simply refuses to believe it. It doesn't make sense to her. The more you know about the way the world works, the more you realize how little we human beings understand God's design. But he thought it all up and then he executed it by his almighty power.

That's the God we worship. That God made us in our mother's wombs. No matter what observations you want to make about biology, you exist because God made you. You have the gifts and talents that you possess, you face the hardships and the joys that have come into your life because the one true God is in control of all things. Creation teaches us that.

And in that creation, we see one thing more: God's love. When that first moment of creation was finished and darkness was on the face of the waters, "**the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.**"

Think of a mother hovering over a pot in which she's making dinner for her family. Think of her love and attention. The Holy Spirit hovered over the waters in love, giving his undivided attention to the work of God's hands because God was making a world that was to be the one place in the universe that would have everything that we need for life and health and joy. That's the true God, a God of power and wisdom and a God of deep, unsearchable love for beings that didn't even exist yet.

The one true God knows exactly what we need, because he made us. He always works for our good. Who is that one true God? The Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. You can see that here in a couple of different ways. The first one is in the word "God." The Hebrew word translated as "God" here is plural. Many times in the Bible it means "gods" when it refers to the heathen gods. But here, it refers to the one God who made the world. How can I tell? Because the verb "created" is singular. A very rough translation might go like this: "In the beginning, Gods, he created the heavens and the earth." Every time that the Bible uses this Hebrew word to talk about the true God, it works like that, it makes God singular and plural.

That's not all. The Spirit of God is mentioned right there with the Father. His hovering was part of the creating. And at least twice, the New Testament tells us that Jesus created the world. Yet, hundreds of times, the Bible says that the Father made the world. How can all that be true? Because the true God is one God. Yet he is three distinct persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. All three are God, fully and completely. Yet, they are not three separate gods. They are one God. And the Father is not the Son. The Son is not the Holy Spirit. Yet the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Spirit. Sound confusing? It should. There are things about God that we can never understand. If you can ever get one plus one plus one to add up to one, you've made a mistake. And if you can ever get the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons and one God to make sense logically, you've made a mistake.

So why worry about it? Because this is the only God there is. All other gods are figments of our imagination. We live in an age in which all religions are viewed as equally valid. But the Bible speaks differently. God says that he is God and apart from him there is no other. And the only way that we can reach eternal life is through faith in him – faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Anyone who does not believe in that God will not reach eternal life, no matter how good we think they are or how sincere they are in their convictions.

Does that bother you? I'm not surprised if it does. We're all products of our times and our culture. But you must understand what God is telling us. The idea that all religions are equally valid and all those who believe in any god will make it to heaven is a trap of the devil and a lie that comes from our own sinful heart. Why would the devil tell us a lie like that? To destroy our faith and to keep us from working to bring others to faith. The devil is going to spend eternity in hell and he wants us to take as many people with him as he can. So he wants to shut us up by making us ashamed of a teaching that's politically incorrect. He wants us to question and abandon our faith in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But the God who made the world is greater than the devil. He built his power into his word. That power gives us faith. That power sustains our faith in the face of the lies of the devil and the tricks of our own sinful hearts. That power makes us bold to confess the truth even when a part of us doesn't want to. That power defeats the sinner inside us and brings us at last to eternal life. Only the true God has that power. **The Trinity still matters because we need to know the one true God.**

## II.

Skipping six days forward in the creation account to the creation of man, we come to another indication of the Trinity. God said, "**Let us make man in our image, in our likeness ...**" Some people argue this is a plural of majesty, like when the Queen of England says, "We are not amused." But God does not speak that way in the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, God says "I" not "We." This "let us" is more than just a figure of speech. It's the Holy Trinity taking counsel within himself as he prepared to make Adam and through him, all mankind.

Notice the special gift God gave us on that day. He made us in his image and in his likeness. Now what does that mean? When I was a kid, I saw a TV preacher say that this means that we look like God. He said, "God has a nose about like yours and ears about like yours and eyes about like yours." My friends, that is not what this means. God is a spirit. He doesn't have a body. God doesn't look like us.

The image of God is being perfect and holy and in harmony with him. That's how God made Adam and Eve. Sadly, that joy did not continue. They fell into sin. God gave them one simple command, "Don't eat

from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” But the devil tempted them. He put ideas into their heads that they never would’ve thought up with on their own. They decided that God wasn’t being fair to them. So they rebelled. They ate from that tree and destroyed the image of God in their own hearts – and in ours. Forever after, we human beings are born in the image of our fathers, in the image of sin.

That’s kind of a striking thought for Father’s Day, isn’t it? What we fathers give our children is our sin. Each of us inherited sin from our own father. That inherited sin makes us guilty in God’s sight. And that sin drives us to rebel against God just like Adam and Eve did. So we spend our lives trying to avoid the commands God gives us. We want to do what we want to do. We don’t love coming to church. We have to make our kids come. We find long, doctrinal sermons boring. We want something new and different. All that is sin in our hearts. Sin hates being told what to do. Sin hates thinking that someone else, even God, is smarter than I am. Sin hates feeling guilty, so it denies God’s law. When we cannot deny the law, sin in the supreme act of pride, declares that my guilt is so bad that no one, not even God, could ever forgive me. And sin despairs, like Judas did. Sometimes, sinners even take their own lives.

That sin lives in our hearts. When we were born, that sin lived there alone. Because of that sin, we all deserve to spend eternity in hell. But before God even created the world, he planned to rescue us. On the day that Adam and Eve sinned, God revealed his plan. When the time was right, the Son of God would enter the womb of the Virgin Mary and become one of us. He would live a real human life in the world we live in. He would suffer everything we suffer and face every temptation that torments us. But he would never lose the image of God. He would never sin. Then he would lay that life down on the cross. Because he would be the Son of God, his one perfect life and his death would count for all us sinners. It would erase our sins from God’s record. God fulfilled that plan. Jesus died and he paid for your sins and my sins, for the sins we were born with and for the sins that we have committed every day since we came into this world. Jesus died and he paid for it all. Then he rose and God declared that we are all forgiven.

Then the Holy Spirit carried that message to the ends of the earth. He works through that good news. He gave us faith. He sustains our faith. He nurtures us with communion and the announcement of forgiveness and the memory of our baptism. From the moment the Holy Spirit started working in our hearts, he restored the image of God. We are being renewed, day by day, in God’s image. Now, for as long as we live in this sinful world, the image of God in us is at war with the image of our sinful fathers. Day by day, the battle goes on. But the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit live in us through the gospel. They fight for us through the gospel. They guide our lives and they guarantee that we will reach eternal life. **The Trinity still matters because we need to have God’s image.**

And we do. That’s the beauty of what God has given us. The Father sent his Son to die and rise for us. The Son came and paid for our sins and returned to the Father. The Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit to give us faith and to bring us to heaven. Every day of our lives, those three work to bring us home. That one God is the only true God. Trust in him. Amen.