

Three in One

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[0 : 00] As Janet mentioned earlier, if you are joining us tonight maybe for the first time or if you haven't been around for the last few weeks, we are in week five of a series in the Trinity and it's a bit of a furphy that we're finishing tonight because technically I'm going to drag it out for another week next week just because we're all having so much fun.

So next week in the combined service we'll be looking at a particular aspect of the Trinity but we will kind of wrap up tonight as well and hopefully pull together some of the things that we have been wrestling with for the last four weeks.

So how about I pray because obviously this is a task beyond us and we'll ask God to reveal himself to us. Father God, we thank and praise you for bringing us here tonight. We thank you for your word.

We thank you that you're a God who wants to be known and Father we ask that now as we sit and we wrestle with you as Trinity that you would show yourself to us in a way that we may love you more, that we may see you more clearly, that we may grasp more of your majesty and that we might be better equipped to live lives in response to your glory.

Father we thank you for drawing us here tonight and ask that you would send us out as different people for your sake. Amen. I went to a conference sometime last year with a few people from this church, some musos and there was some really great stuff we learnt that day but there was one line that stuck with me that irritated me and I couldn't figure out why.

[1 : 27] The line that kept getting kind of put out there was that the truth of God is in the in-between. I get what the preacher was getting at but it continued to annoy me more and more and more and as we got to this series I think I understand why it's annoying me.

The premise that he was putting out there is that that the Christian life is one of paradox. So we are forgiven freely and completely and yet we are called to work hard and do good works.

We are called to feel safe in God and called to fear God. And so he was talking about how you can't stay at one end or the other end, you need to be in between the two.

And again I see what he's getting at but I think he's actually missing something. I think if we jump in the middle we're actually reducing either extreme. Whereas the Bible doesn't do that and throughout this series we've been focusing on the distinction that is in God that there is three persons that are unique and distinct and have a unique role and tonight we move to focus on the one God.

And so it would be dangerous for us to just kind of try and jump in the middle because it's awkward for us to hold three and one at the same time. But the truth is not found in the middle. The truth is found holding firmly to what Scripture affirms that God is three and firmly to what Scripture affirms that God is one.

[2 : 54] And so just like I've begun the last few weeks of the series except for last week I want to begin by stating four things that are true according to Scripture. The first one is there is only one God.

Second one, that God is also three persons Father, Son and Spirit. Each member of that Trinity is equally God eternally God and fully God and lastly each member of the Trinity is a distinct personal expression of the one undivided divine nature.

There is a lot wrapped up in those four statements and again I want to affirm that it is incomprehensible for us but it's still important. That it is difficult to wrestle with but it's true.

And so we're going to have a go tonight. So let's just quickly think back through where we've been throughout this series. We've begun with the Father who is supreme over the Son and the Spirit and over all creation.

It is the Father who has absolute authority and it is also the Father who shows love to the Son and the Spirit who is generous in including the Son and the Spirit in His work and is generous in including us in His work.

[4 : 02] We looked at the Son who submits to the Father who joyfully submits to the Father even though He has been exalted. We looked at the Son who reveals the Father the Son who substitutes for us so that we can know the Father and last week Glenn Davies took us through looking at the Spirit who submits to both the Father and the Son whilst at the same time empowers the Son and also empowers us for the life that God has called us to.

So, so far all of our focus has been on the distinct persons of the Trinity the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and on one level breaking it down like that has made it much easier to stomach because it's easy to say the Father is supreme and has authority if we stop there.

And it's easy to say the Son submits and the Son reveals and the Son does all this thing if we stop there. And it's easy to say that the Spirit is the one who submits to both and has a unique role to play and He kind of brings the benefits of Jesus to us if we stop there.

But the challenge is or the tensions appear to become more stark when we try and bring those three things together. Because the Father is God the Son is God and the Spirit is God and so immediately we have this uncomfortableness how can one have authority and submit?

How can one send and go and remain one? And so there are apparent issues for us and this is the point where all the illustrations and analogies that we come up with in the Trinity begin to fall down.

[5 : 38] The water one it's solid, gas and liquid but it's not three and one at the same time at least in our experience.

Again I give credit to Nicole Smith who assures me that that is possible but in my experience it's not. But in God as we wrestle with what is uncomfortable and it's okay for us to acknowledge that that it is awkward in God we don't find tension.

I understand why we feel the tension but we don't find tension. If we look closely as we have been what we find is majesty. The difficulty of understanding the God that we follow feeds our worship. It shouldn't belittle it it shouldn't put barriers in what we do as we begin to understand the depths of a God who is beyond our understanding but a God who wants us to know Him and a God who has revealed Himself sufficiently so that we can know Him.

The tension that we feel doesn't need to be tension. It can be a gift as we begin to see the majesty of a God that is bigger and greater and more complicated than us and particularly tonight as we see the love that binds the three into one.

[6 : 59] Have John 17 open in front of you and I want to fairly quickly run through and pick out a few things that show us the love of God that makes the three one and then I'm going to try and leave a decent chunk of time for us to all wrestle with it with some questions.

When we look at God the Trinity when we look at God Father, Son and Spirit we can understand love because in God love is expressed and even enhanced by the distinction that is there.

For us the three is a barrier to being one but in God the three actually is what supports the oneness. In music there is lots of terms I'm not very musical and I won't pretend that I am but there are lots of terms that describe the way that you can layer music and add different effects and that sort of thing the vocalist can correct me if I'm wrong but you can have unison where everybody sings exactly the same thing and that has a value to it and a beauty to it and a power and a force but what you can also have is harmony where you have three people singing slightly different things but to the same song which actually gives a breadth and a depth and a layering and a complexity to the same song. I'm not going to try and demonstrate because that would not work but in God we could have a father who does something a son who does the same thing and a spirit who does the same thing but what we have instead is a harmony of purpose.

They read the same song but they sing different parts and what we see at the end is not not a barrier but it is something that opens up to see the beauty of the oneness that is God.

[8 : 44] I'm aware that that's a word that I'm making up but it is a good word. There is threeness and there is oneness in God and when we look at the three and their different roles we find them very intertwined and we find them following the same tune the same purpose.

In the threeness of God in the Father, Son and the Spirit we find an equality with submission and authority. We talked about this when we looked at Father and when we looked at Son and when we hear submission or we hear authority we instantly think that is a barrier to us being equal.

For us submission means being lesser but God unveils that submission and authority can exist between equals because Father and the Son are the same God.

They are equally God they are fully God they are eternally God and yet the Son joyfully submits to the Father. And so we see that these layers these three can actually contribute to us getting a full understanding of the complex God that we follow.

The love of God is expressed and enhanced by the distinction that exists in him. If it was just God doing the same thing it would still be love it might still be impressive but it is not as beautiful it is not as majestic as God managing to express himself in the three persons in differing roles in relationship in perfect harmony.

[10:14] In God we find a love that unifies. Look at John 17 with me beginning where Jesus begins his prayer. Father the time has come glorify your Son that your Son may glorify you.

You granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do and now Father glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

There is this amazing picture in these first five verses and if you look back through John chapters 15 and 16 as well where the Trinity is so committed to one another that they are giving themselves to one another.

So Jesus' prayer here is that he would be glorified but to what end? That the Father would be glorified. The Father's agenda has always been making himself known he is the ultimate he is the supreme and in the Son's request to be glorified is actually a request for the glory of the Father.

[11:21] So close is the relationship between Father and Son that what matters most to the Father has become what matters most to the Son. It's the same as when we experience relationships here on earth.

You begin a relationship there may be things that you've never thought about pouring your time or interest or energy into but the joy of relationship is that your care for the other person enables you to learn to love and care for the things that they love and care for.

One of Sal's passions as a younger girl was gymnastics. Now I'm not there yet but I'm convinced that eventually I might be able to love that out of my love for her. In our own relationships as we get to know one another more.

As we give access to ourselves increasingly we learn to love what the person we are in a relationship with loves. And here we see a picture of the Son's love for the Father.

His desire his prayer here when he asks to be glorified is put me on the cross. That's what he's asking the Father to do in this prayer.

[12:27] That is the ultimate glorification of the Father is Jesus dying and so he prays please Father kill me so that you get glory. It is no sense of divine child abuse.

It's not God please don't. It's God I want what you want. Father I know this is your plan and I want it. I love you so much and I know your love in my life so much that I want what you want.

Within the Trinity what matters to one matters to the others. and so we see this unifying love that draws them into a common purpose to see the Father glorified.

Now we're going to unpack glorifying the Father a little bit more next week so I'm going to leave that to the side just for now. But I want you to see that as you look at the different members of the Trinity and we've found this as we've gone through each week as you look at one you can't help but look at the others.

So close is their relationship that as you look at the Son all he does is point you to the Father. All he does is say the Father is the one that matters it's not about me the object of my love the purpose of my life is the Father.

[13:35] As you look at the Spirit all he wants to do is point you to the Son because the object of his love the object of his desire is that the Son be glorified. If you look at the Father all he wants to do is point to the Son and say here is my Son whom I love this is the one I delight in this is the one I will glorify and raise above every other name so connected are the three that the distinction almost disappears almost it's still there and it still matters but so close are they that in one you begin to see the others the fancy word that theologians use for the closeness of the Trinity is a word called perichoresis and the best illustration anyone can come up for is a dance those of you who were on kick last year will remember that we learnt that dancing is a funny illustration for a white male the

only experience of dancing that I can think of is usually forced upon me it usually happens towards the end of a wedding reception and I remember at my own wedding there's this description on the order of service that we're going to have a bridal waltz ours was at best was a bridal shuffle and from all the weddings that I've been to that's the general pattern most dancing that we experience isn't particularly beautiful isn't particularly unified but when it is it's amazing to watch when two people can move in perfect unity knowing where the other person is going to go and when they're going to go there and not stepping on each other's toes it is a beautiful thing and that is the picture we have of the Trinity and just to make it extra complicated there's a third member the Trinity dances in perfect unity in perfect timing in perfect harmony completely joined in purpose joined in love that is the picture that scripture gives us of the oneness that we find in God we find a love between father son and spirit that brings joy and delight in John chapter 15

Jesus prays that his disciples might remain in the father's love because by remaining in his love they'll know the joy that the son knows in the father's love the son has been obedient to the father and he wants them to experience the full joy that he has in Luke chapter 3 as Jesus is baptized the father expresses his delight in his son and even though the spirit seems to not get much of a run through much of the bible the spirit in no sense feels like it's missing out there is no hint anywhere in scripture that the spirit wishes it had a bigger billing the spirit joyfully points to the son 1 John 4 tells us this is how we know that it's the spirit of God because it testifies that Jesus is Lord the proof that it's the spirit is it's pointing to the son there is an absolute unity and there is a delight in the relationships between the father son and spirit there is love in perfect relationship that opens a challenge for us

I think because we like to believe and we like to be told that God made the world because he wanted a relationship with us but if the father son and spirit are already in perfect relationship he doesn't need to God is already absolutely complete within himself the father is being perfectly loved by the son and spirit he is expressing perfect love towards the son and spirit everything is unified it is joyous it is delightful it is fantastic God doesn't have to there is no need in God that warrants creation let alone salvation and yet it happens the creation of which we are a part and the salvation for which we are thankful is an overflow of the love and delight and unity that exists within God creation creation is an expression of that perfect love creation is designed to be a delight to the creator and the creator is a delight to creation when we're willing to see him creation is an overflow of the loving relationship within the God head love breeds love

God's perfect love breeds love it's like when you go to a wedding and suddenly every person that's been dating longer than three weeks is feeling a pressure to also get married something about the romance at a reception but the love that is on display at a wedding suddenly stokes the fire in at least one member of every couple in the room God's love produces creation creation is an overflow of who God is and it's more than just a model of what love should look like have a look at John 17 verse 20 Jesus gets to the end of this prayer and he's had prayed for his disciples and he turns as Glenn told us last week to pray for us he says my prayer is not for them alone I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one father just as you are in me and I am in you may they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me I have given them the glory that you gave me that they may be one as we are one I in them and you in me may they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me love has drawn us in the relationship that God has desired and desired for you is not something other than the relationship he has within himself Jesus comes to draw you into the perfect delightful love and joy and unity that is the Trinity that is

[20 : 17] God's design for you not that you might know him over here on the side while they continue to have perfect unity the prayer is may they also that's us be in us the father and son so that the world may believe that you have sent me God wants to draw you into that kind of love he wants you to know him the way the son knows him he wants to love you the way he has loved the son and revealed himself to the son and shown himself to the son we were chatting about this in staff meeting this week and Steve I think he read it somewhere but we gave him credit as a wise man said that it's a bit like a group hug the father son and spirit are enjoying each other's company and affection and through what Jesus has done the spirit draws us in so that we are in that group hug so that we are not next to it we are not near it but we are part of the incredible love of

God we are drawn into who he is now in part but eventually completely and eternally that is the picture of heaven is all of God all of his goodness all of his love with no barrier forever what a gift

that a complete God would do everything that he has done in creation in sending his son in giving us his spirit simply to draw us into a love that was already complete what a generous and gracious God but that has challenges that go with it as well I was reflecting this week and I do feel a slight sense of awkwardness I feel less awkward because

I believe it's the testimony of scripture but I do feel a slight sense of awkwardness as we reflect on what that means for us as a community what that means for me as a pastor and for you as members of St.

Paul's I want to suggest two things firstly we are the community of God's people God who is relational who loves relationship who loves serving and loving and giving Ange and Rob had the joy of beginning their new family very recently I promise I won't pick on you all the time but you're just the most recently married an important thing that you guys figured out in the lead up to your marriage is that you need a second person for it it would be a significantly less exciting marriage if it was just one person down the front making some promises to themselves and yet that is the way that so many of us approach following Jesus God has called us to be in relationship not just with him but with all of those that he has called to himself and yet so often our version of relationship means turning up on a Sunday and then knowing a few names that are sitting around me we were not saved to be individual or to be isolated now

I understand some people are introverted some people are out there but we are called into the relationship that is God and we are not called alone if you are called and I are called we are called into one relationship the God relationship that is ever expanding as he draws people into himself we are called into community the second thing is that community needs to be more than just proximity more than just being near one another I was in Chatswood Chase yesterday the day before it was raining there was a lot of people there I was very close to a whole bunch of other people in their cars but you can rest assured there was nothing loving about the way that we were relating to one another I saw two all the way around the corner connected because neither one wanted to give in the point is just because you're next to someone maybe even touching them that doesn't mean that you are in a relationship in the way that

[24 : 37] God has called you to if we are to be God's people if we are to reflect the relationship that he has called us into then we need to love like he loves weeks need to become marks of this community not instantly not completely not perfectly but by the power of God's spirit in us they need to increasingly become the mark of who we are is this a place where mutual love exists where people just love to be honest and transparent and open themselves up and invest in the lives of others can we recognize that we are equal even though some of us may have authority can we rejoice in lowly roles or lowly positions because we know that we are equal in Christ can we be just as excited about being asked to work in the car park on a

Sunday morning as we are about being asked to lead the service because we know that we are equal in Christ can we rejoice in the fact that we are distinct just like God is yet we are unified by the same love that unifies him it is God's love that draws us together and that is why we can be confident that we are equal whatever role you may have whatever job you may do within our church family you are still an adopted child of God you do not exist in so much as you're the usher or you're the supper person or you're the you are a child of God one with the blood of Christ and drawn into the group hug by the spirit and so we can serve wholeheartedly and enthusiastically and behind the scenes and without thanks because we know that we are loved by God imagine if this community looked like the community that is

God imagine if this community just tripped over itself to love and serve one another imagine if not just on Sunday but every minute of our days we were thinking of how we could love one another we were desperately praying for one another that we might grow in our godliness that we might continue to wrestle with sin in our lives imagine if we were completely unified around the purpose of being the image of God imagine not just the impact it would have out there but the impact it would have on us suddenly we get to be the image of God for one another we get to show them what it means that God loves them unconditionally we we we get to show them what it means that God gave his son imagine what kind of a difference we would make for one another what kind of an impact we would have on Chatswood and

Sydney and Australia and the world if we reflected our God who is three in one that is my heart for us I believe that is God's heart for us and the amazing joy of a challenge like that is that God empowers us to be that God gives us his spirit to transform us and to run over the top of our

weaknesses so that we can love when we don't feel like it so that we can love when we are tired so that we can put honest about the fact that we are struggling even though we are scared about what other people will think God by his spirit will empower us to do that if we would just depend on him trust in the love that he has shown us let me finish by reading a passage from 1 John 1 John 4 verse 7 says dear friends let us love one another for love comes from God everyone has been born of God and knows God whoever does not love does not know God because God is love this is how God showed his love among us he sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him this is love not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins dear friends since God so loved us we also ought to love one another no one has ever seen God but if we love one another God lives in us and his love is made complete in us we know that we live in him and he in us because he has given us of his spirit and we have seen and testify that the father has sent his son to be the savior of the world if anyone on the love God has for us let's pray father god we want to acknowledge that even as we reflect on the wonder of your unity and your love we still feel that tension god give us hearts to trust in the bits that we struggle to understand help us to know and experience your love in our relationships with one another in such a way that we see you more clearly [30 : 15] God please work in each and every person in this room that we may be a community that reflects you help us to joyfully confess sin to one another confident that we are loved and not judged help us to eagerly desire that one another would grow help us to be invested in seeing godliness increasingly in each and every one beyond father thank you that it begins with your love for us thank you that it begins with Jesus on the cross and that by your spirit we know your love is working in us please transform our hearts that we might love what you love that we might love you as you deserve that we might love your people as you do God please use us for your purpose and your glory amen