



## **“Who is God?”**

Holy Trinity  
Saturday and Sunday, May 26, 27, 2018  
All Services  
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 6:1-8; Psalm 29; Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17

Grace and peace be to you from our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

When I was in college I studied some philosophy. Really it was more of a survey course that took us all the way through the great philosophers, starting with the Greeks, and going all the way to the modern age.

There was one particular philosopher that I thought was kind of interesting named Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche was a German philosopher, although he told people that he was Polish. He was a philosopher during the mid-1800s when there was a tremendous amount of societal change. This would have been during the Industrial Revolution when there was the movement from the more agrarian society to the more industrialized society. Of course, the Industrial Revolution was going full force and there were a lot of changes that were happening in society as it related to science and scientific inquiry. This was also the time of the Theory of Evolution of Charles Darwin.

Nietzsche's most famous line was this. "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him."

Now, Nietzsche was enthralled with all of the changes that were occurring, and he saw that as an advancement. As those things that were considered mysterious, at least in the realm of the church, began to be broken down. But we are reminded that also at this time, as society became more urbanized and industrialized, it was really the church that cared for the people in those urban settings. It was the church, the disciples of Jesus, that tried to help people as they became increasingly marginalized by all of the great movements that were happening all around them.

I would imagine that there are many of us who might be concerned about what we have seen in society over the last number of decades as God seems to be pushed and pushed further and further out into the margins.

Some of you might remember when there was prayer in schools, or activities, or at least somewhat accommodating to religion. When I was a pastor in Queens, the children would be released toward the end of day on Thursday, so they could go to their confirmation classes, or CCD, if they were Roman Catholic. By the time I had gotten there that was a thing of the past.

If you've ever been to a Christmas concert recently – well, no one has been to a Christmas concert recently, you've been to a holiday concert. You know what I mean.

I think it's important as we reflect on these changes in our society for us to be sure as Christians – who is God? Who is this one that week after week, Sunday after Sunday we come to worship? And so, I pose the question, "Who is God?" But even in the question, I'm trying to say something because it recognizes right away that God is a "who" not a "what." The God that we worship every Sunday is not just some God in general, is not a nameless deity. The great religious question that we have before us is not, I believe, is there a God? The great religious question is "which is God?"

In the 1950s, theologian Paul Tillich authored the definition for god as "being that about which you are ultimately concerned." Now you can imagine that for a lot of religions they would be able to say, well, our concern is Buddha, or Allah, or Vishnu, or Christ. But with Tillich's definition, they also see that god can be something more than that as well. Perhaps it's pride, or maybe it's the accumulation of money. Or perhaps it's power of influence. I mean, after all, we live within the shadow of the State House. Perhaps, even you can become your own god as your ultimate concern.

The God that we worship invites us to make a choice. The God we worship invites us to faithfulness amid this plethora of other gods. And I would suggest that life and meaning hinges on the identity of God and of nothing else. The first commandment says as much. "I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods." Ultimate allegiance belongs to this God.

If you would ask Christians – well, tell me more about your God. Tell me more about who this God is. We would turn to the creeds; the Apostles', the Nicene, or the Athanasian Creed. Now a creed is a statement of belief. It is not popular opinion. It is not even the opinion of the pastor. It is the community's creed. It is the community's statement in which the church makes a declaration and a confession – to whom shall we offer allegiance in a world of many gods?

And what does the creed say? First, we believe in a creator, the maker of heaven and earth. That's what God does. God creates out of his sheer energy. God creates you, me, everything that we see, everything that we are part of. And God wants a relationship with that creation. He cares for it, he nurtures it, he breathes life into it. God rushes into life. He doesn't just wind it up and let it on its own. The history of the Bible is one of God engaging with that creation and with the people that he created. You and I are made in his very image – Imago Dei. And everything that is, is in God's hands. All events are subject to his will. It's not in our hands, but God places our hand in his own.

And we believe in Jesus Christ – God's only Son. God's son loves us to death ... and even beyond death. As John says, God so loved the world that he gave his only son that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life. He is the only son. He is not one among many gurus, or saviors, or pseudo saviors. Jesus claims the identity of God and then demonstrates that he can have that by dying and rising from the dead, and ascending into heaven to be with his father. And because of that, you and I can boldly proclaim him, Lord.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit. The Spirit that has been there from the very beginning. That holy ruach – the wind over creation. That breath that breathes into the lungs of Adam and Eve and gave them life. And it gives every Adam and Eve after them throughout history – life. That same Spirit has inspired prophets and saints and disciples of every age. It gathers the believers like you and me around Word and Sacrament. It inspires us for mission. It gives life to the church and to the holy people of God. The church of Jesus Christ has a spirit and that spirit is nothing less than God's spirit that strengthens and sustains, inspires and prods us forward in the faith.

This God that we worship has been called many things in the Bible. In Genesis, he is God, the creator of heaven earth. In Exodus, I AM, who I AM. In Joshua, the Mighty One. In 2 Samuel, the Lord Almighty. In Isaiah, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Somebody should take that and turn it into a song).

In Matthew, Emmanuel, God with us. In John, the Logos, the eternal Word made flesh. In Ephesians, he is Savior. In Hebrews, the Great Shepherd. And in Revelation, the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Lamb who comes to give life to God's people.

He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the God who raised Jesus from the dead. The God who touches our hearts and calls us into ministry in his name. He is the God who is Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

These names that we hear in the Bible, as meaningful as they are, cannot even capture the wonderful mystery that is our God, who we celebrate this day and every day.

Albert Einstein once wrote: "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the Mysterious – the knowledge of the existence of something unfathomable to us, the manifestation of the most profound reason coupled with the most brilliant beauty."

This mystery invites you and I into a relationship. Calls us into the family of God. We are made that in baptism and called Child of God as water is poured over our forehead and the name of God is spoken and you and I take on the name of Christ.

Celtic Christians who lived over a thousand years ago have profound understanding of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. These early Christians from Scotland and Ireland have offered us a benediction.

"The Father of many resting places grant you rest;  
The Christ who stilled the storm grant you calm; The Spirit who fills all things grant you peace.  
God's light be your light,  
God's love be your love,  
God's way be your way."

Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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