

The Holy Trinity – 2022

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Acts 2:14a, 22-36

John 8:48-59

The God Who Died

Sometimes I see these billboards. They are attempting to be evangelistic. You may have seen them yourself. They'll use catchy phrases like "Got God?" reminiscent of the old "Got Milk?" ads. Or "Try God" as if He is just another product within our consumer culture. These billboards are promoting God as if He is something for advertisers to sell, to convince people that they need Him. But who is God?

In a 2014 survey 83% of Americans said that they were certain or fairly certain that there is a God. But what would those surveyed say if asked the question: Who is God?

Today is *Trinity Sunday*. So today we are going to consider this question.

If you ask the man on the street: "Who is God?" what would he say? Actor Morgan Freeman recently hosted a National Geographic documentary called *The Story of God*. In it he tries to define who God is.

"God is so many things to so many people: the warm light of the sun, the sound of sweet music, an inner voice that drives us forward, a friend. If you ask me who God is, I would say there's a bit of the divine in all of us. There's God in you. There's God in me. The God in me is who I really am at my core. The God in me is the best version of me. The God in me is who I strive to be; who I was meant to be."

Ummmm, no; that's not God. That's a god Mr. Freeman just made up. This is important, because it calls into question all of the evangelistic outreaches that call people to believe in "God" without identifying who God actually is. Which God? Is it Allah, the false god of Islam? Is it the Heavenly Father of Mormonism? Or is it a god of the Morgan Freeman variety; a little god that is part of us who molds himself to our desires? It turns out that the word "god" is too generic. It has lost its meaning because when a person says that they believe in "god", it doesn't actually tell us anything specific!

Who is the real God? How can we know Him?

Scripture reveals a much different God; a God who does not bend to our wishes; a God who is true when every man is a liar; a God who is NOT who I am at my core, but is always Who He is; Who exists even if we believe He doesn't; a God who defies human comprehension; a God who exists in three persons; a Triune God.

And God has a name. In Exodus, when God commissions Moses to lead the people out of Egypt, Moses questions God.

Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” (Exodus 3:13).

What is your name, God? His answer?

God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14).

Just “I am.” “The One who EXISTS sent you.” I AM, YHWH, sent you. This profound. The name of God is “I Am/ I Exist.”

But if we want to know who God is; if we want to encounter Him, and not some hyper-spiritual, wishy-washy, touchy-feely experience. If we want to see and touch and hear this God who exists, we must turn to Jesus. In our gospel reading this morning we read where Jesus is talking to the people and He makes the following claim.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death” (John 8:52).

What a claim! So much for Jesus just being a “good teacher”! What mere man can make such a claim? And what does it even mean? His listeners picked up on this, saying:

“Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” (John 8:53).

Ha! Never taste death? Everybody dies! Abraham and the prophets are dead! This Jesus was clearly making odd claims about Himself. And how does He respond?

Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” (John 8:53-57).

This really confuses them. Is this Rabbi claiming to have met Abraham? How did Abraham see Him? Well, the answer to that is found in Genesis, where Abraham is given the prophecies that His offspring would be the Christ and bless the world. This fact, however, got past the listeners.

It is what Jesus says next that really rocks the boat. Listen closely!

Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am” (John 8:58).

Did you catch that? He doesn’t simply make the claim that He is very old. He could have said, “Before Abraham was, I was.” Instead HE says **“before Abraham was, I am.”** This is the

name God gave to Moses from the burning bush. Jesus is claiming to be the God of the burning bush; the God of Mt Sinai and the God of the Exodus!

So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple (John 8:59).

Scripture teaches, without question, the deity of Jesus Christ. This is why we cannot simply say, believe in God! That is too vague. Nobody knows what you are talking about! There's this quote of Luther's that I really love. He wrote:

“Men in the schools of higher learning have hitherto speculated about God's works in heaven above and have played with them, asking themselves what He is, thinks, and does by Himself, etc. But if you really want to fare safely and really find and grasp God so as to find grace and help with him, then let no one persuade you to look for Him anywhere else except in the Lord Christ.”

“I should and will know of no God other than the God who is in my Lord Christ.”

It is in the face of the God-man, Jesus Christ, that we see the face of God. He is the Word of God made flesh, who came to dwell among us. He came to be one of us. He came to die as one of us! And this death is the most perplexing part of all.

Jesus died for you! We say this so often and hear it so often that it, sadly, almost sounds cliché. But let's rephrase it a bit, and perhaps we can break through those callouses that shield us from the true meaning of the phrase. *God died for you!* God, the creator of all things, allowed Himself to be beaten and flogged and nailed, a bloody pulp of a man, naked and humiliated, onto a piece of wood; on display for the world to see, and to laugh at and to mock. *What CAN this mean?*

Why? How? It must have been something big for God to choose to do this. It must have been for a profound reason. And whatever He was trying to accomplish, there must have been no other way! It's too extreme of a measure! It's scandalous; unthinkable. If I didn't know better, I would say that it is blasphemy to even consider it! Indeed; it was to save the world.

Look around. We wrecked the world. Spoiled it! It was good. But we broke it. Like one rotten apple ruins the whole barrel, Adam and Eve introduced sin and rot to the world. We have fallen. And in our despair, where did we turn? To anything and everything other than the true God! Gods of our own creation – that's where we turned. To the Zeuses and the Ras and the Baals of our own imagination. Today perhaps we might say possessions and politics and ourselves – that's where we are turning. And in popular culture, even many who claim belief in God, are only believing in a god which they find within themselves. And though none of us may worship Thor, the Norse god of Thunder (I'm pretty sure), we all are idolaters in some way or other.

At times we are like those who questioned Jesus, trying to make Him say what we want Him to say, rather than what He actually said. We sinfully want God to be who we want him to be; a God who, like a genie, grants our every wish. When we ask for something, and He does not give it to us we whine, or accuse Him of not listening . . . or existing.

How often do we commit idolatry by trying to remake God into our own image? How often do we try and make Him whatever we want Him to be in that moment?

When evil happens the world shouts out “Where is your God now?” “Why doesn’t He put a stop to this?” They mercilessly scream down fire and brimstone on the evildoers, calling for a God who would do as they think He should. In these times we want God’s justice and wrath. We want Him to stomp out evil.

But when we look in the mirror at ourselves and see the sinful, selfish person staring back at us. When we suffer, where do we turn first? To God? Or do we tend to trust more in our own schemes and plans; in our bank account; in legislatures? Think about it. Where do you go? Where do you run? Where do you hide? Is it in the loving arms of God? Do you hide yourself in the saving wounds of Christ? How often are we idolaters who by no means ought to inherit the kingdom of heaven?

And so, we find ourselves caught in our own trap. We want a God who will judge the sin of others . . . harshly . . . with fire and brimstone, but we also want a God who will turn the other way at our own sins. Like Morgan Freeman who defines God as “The God in me is who *I* really am at my core . . .the best version of *me* . . .who *I* strive to be . . . who *I* was meant to be.” We don’t want a God who might actually JUDGE *our* SIN. No. We want the friendly grandfather God who pats us on the head and says: “It’s okay, run along and play.” In our flesh we want cheap grace. A free pass God. A no consequences God.

But this is not the God revealed to us. No. He is a God who punishes sin. Any and all sin. Think of the great Flood. Think of Sodom and Gomorrah. God does not play around. There is no patting on the head. Sin must be judged. Those heinous crimes we see on the news must be judged. Your sin must be judged. My sin must be judged. Scripture does indeed paint a picture of a wrathful, vengeful God.

And so, we come full-circle. Returning to Calvary. God on a cross. There He hung. Dying. The only God; dying. All of the vengeance and wrath against all of the sins of humanity poured out on this one man. And no ordinary man could cover the sins of the world. The death of any ordinary man would only be the payment for his own sin. Only the sinless God, who deserved no death, could pay price for someone else’s sin. And only the infinite God could take on the sins of ALL.

Luther makes another comment in this regard. “God Himself is a terrible God if we want to deal with Him apart from Christ - a God in whom we find no comfort but only wrath and displeasure!” Harsh words. But true.

As Jesus said in today’s text: **“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”** This is because He died FOR you, that even though you die, yet may you live again! So . . .

Believe! Believe in the Triune God who exists. The God who exists: One God – Three Persons: The Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Not in some god that you find within yourself. Not Morgan Freeman’s god. Believe in the God who is out there. Believe in the God who is who He is

regardless of who we think HE ought to be. Believe in the God that you find in Jesus Christ; in His face; in His words; in His wounds. Believe in the God who died for you.