

It goes against human reasoning to think that simplicity and complexity, or simplicity and mystery, can coexist. We want to categorize knowledge into nice, neat compartments. But often times what appears to be simple is either more complex than we could ever imagine or shrouded in mysteries that defy our understanding. In a very real sense this adds to our wonder as we gaze at any object where simplicity and complexity are perfectly brought together.

Using advanced imaging technology and high-tech simulations, scientists are beginning to glimpse the incredible design of cellular machines at work within living cells. Dispelling the notion of the "simple" cell, they are now seeing the complexity of cellular machines made up of dynamic protein complexes that are able to build and rebuild themselves within the cell. Michael Behe, a scientist, author, and proponent of Intelligent Design, wrote of these cellular machines in an op-ed piece in the New York Times. He noted, "*In the past 50 years modern science has shown that the cell, the very foundation of life, is run by machines made of molecules. There are little molecular trucks in the cell to ferry supplies, little outboard motors to push a cell through liquid.*" What scientists are now discovering is that the complexity, interlocking pieces, and interdependent processes within the cell make it unlikely they could have simply evolved.

As I recently watched a PBS series on the same topic, I marveled at God's design and wisdom; that something as simple as a single cell holds complexities and mysteries that man will never fully understand. Yet, on a far grander scale, I also am in wonder and awe at the mysteries of the triune nature of our God. One can glimpse the nature and see the interactions of the Trinity in Scripture, but who can even begin to understand the greatness of the Godhead; the three in one. So there is a part of me wondering what in the world I am doing trying to preach a message on the pattern of community based on a study of the Trinity. So let me begin this morning by asking God to use the frailty of the speaker in a way that would make His Word be predominant and clear so that His name will be worshiped and honored.

[Pray]

In Genesis 1, we have the amazing story of creation; "In the beginning God created"; the heavens and earth were spoken into existence. The creative power of the Trinity works to establish the physical universe and then turns its attention to creating man. Verse 27 picks up and says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." The divine community of the Trinity creates mankind in its image, as a community. Later in verse 2, as Adam names the animals, it is almost as if he realizes that while there are male and female among the animals, for him there is no suitable or completing part. And so God creates woman to complete the community and give Adam someone with whom he can have a relationship.

You could rightly say that God is a community maker. Throughout history, God has created and established a growing sphere of communities that started with Adam and Eve. As we just read, the first community was that of a husband and wife and the families that grow out of them. The next community is at a larger level as God chooses Abraham to bring forth the community nation of Israel. Out of Israel comes Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection makes possible a global community of believers, which is the Church. And one day, those who have believed will be glorified into a heavenly community that is present with God for eternity.

The purpose of this morning's message is to see the image and designs of community as emanating from the Trinity. Just as a biblical view of marriage sees an image of the relationship of Christ and the Church and gives it a more special and holy meaning; so a biblical view of community seeing it patterned after the relationships within the Trinity drives us to value our relationships within the church more deeply. Such a message cannot be based on a single text. Therefore, this morning we will be drawing from a variety of passages to give us a glimpse of the marvelous and mysterious community within the Trinity. So get your Bibles ready, we have a lot of ground to cover.

Seeing the Trinity as a community will require us to first understand its form or essence. The idea of a triune God is unique among all religions. There are several monotheist religions and many pantheistic religions, but Christianity is unique in its doctrine of a single God that is three persons. This distinction is not man-made, as we well know, but is revealed in Scripture to us as part of the mysterious and marvelous nature of our God. It is not an unimportant doctrine, nor is it so shrouded in mystery that it cannot be defined. Rather, the truth of the Trinity is essential to the story of God the Father, who sent His only Son to redeem His people, in whom His Spirit dwells. Our study this morning will reveal the form of the Trinity that is a single united community of three persons, equal, but with different roles and expressions.

First, the Trinity is a singular, united community. This is established in many scriptures, the foremost in many of our minds is taken from Deuteronomy 6:4, which says, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." James echoes this truth in Chapter 2 verse 19, where he writes, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!" Listen to the Words of Jesus as he answers Phillip in John 14:9-10. "Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works."

The doctrine of the Trinity clearly establishes that there is one God whom we worship as the true eternal God. Scripture declares that He is the only God and there are no others. This unity is not modalism, which denies distinctness of the three persons of the Trinity. Nor is it Unitarianism, which denies the deity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Rather it is a view of God that is so essentially one, that though He is a community of three persons, they never act, communicate, or exist independently of the others. Throughout scripture He speaks in a single voice and his redemptive purpose is singular regardless of which person of the Trinity we see.

It is hard to illustrate the Trinity in a physical way. Such illustrations break down and simply cannot convey the true essence of who God is. While they may help in part, they can also be harmful as they either stop short of Biblical truth or outright error. Some of us as children may have heard the Trinity explained as the three states of water; frozen, liquid, and gas. This illustration lends more toward modalism as the water is not three parts, but rather three forms of the same substance. I have also heard of the trinity explained as an egg; having three parts the shell, white, and yolk. Again, while there is some truth here, it oversimplifies the Trinity and denies its indivisible oneness.

Scripture speaks to an essential unity such that the Father is in the Son, the Spirit is in the Son, and the Father in one with the Spirit. This community is expressed within the picture of marriage as well. Paul draws on the sense of community in marriage in Gen. 2:24 when he writes in 1 Corinthians 6:16-17, "For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him." Just as there is an essential unity of a man and wife in marriage, there is an essential unity in our becoming one with Christ as a believer. Both of these communities are patterned after the essential community of the Trinity.

Furthermore, this unity extends to a shared, omniscient knowledge between the members of the Trinity. This is seen in 1 Corinthians 2:11 which reads, "For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." Here we are told that the Spirit has a special knowledge of God that man does not possess. It is a shared omniscience between Father, Son, and Spirit that is only found in God. Thus, there is a perfect oneness of both knowledge and purpose within the Trinity.

This pattern of unity is further established in the community of the Church. In John 17:20-21 we read, *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you..."* Here Jesus prays that the same unity within the Trinity will be exhibited in all believers. There is one true Church and there is to be a oneness or fusing together of who we are. This oneness is expressed in the present, as a community of Christ, and will one day be perfected in his presence as the Church gathers at the marriage supper of the Lamb. The message here is that we are to be a united community just as God is united in all that He is and does.

The unity of the Trinity must be balanced with its essence of three persons. That is, there is a diversity and distinctness of persons with the Godhead. How can this be? How can you maintain the essential oneness of God and then say that there are three persons? First, let me say that while this is difficult to understand, it is not a contradiction. Scripture clearly teaches that although God is one, there are three distinct persons of the Trinity; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the scripture we read earlier, Jesus says that He and the Father are one and that He is in the Father and the Father in Him. They are one, yet distinct. They have always existed as part of God. That is, there has never been a time in eternity past that they have not always existed.

There are many passages that we could go to demonstrate unequivocally the three persons of the Trinity. One of the foremost of these is found in Matthew 28:19 saying, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"*. Note that the word 'name' here is singular indicating God's unity while clearly calling out each person within the Trinity. Another passage is found in Hebrews 1:1-3 where we find this text. *"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power."* The passage expresses the Son as the brightness of God's glory who is the source. When we look into the sky we do not see the actual sun, we see its light, which possesses the same nature and qualities of its source. Christ bears the same nature and essence of God, but is the reflection or radiance of God's glory.

As an image of this community, the Church similarly possesses a diversity of persons that are now new creatures in Christ. We have been born again and now bear the imprint of the very nature of Christ; we now exist in Christ, share His nature, and reflect the radiance of His glory. Our community together bears the same pattern of community we see in the Trinity. We are foreknown in Christ in eternity past and will live with him in the eternal future.

So there is a unity within the Trinity, there are three distinct persons within its community, and lastly there is an also equal nature of its persons. That is to say that each person of the Trinity is equally God. The Son is not less divine than the Father nor is the Spirit less divine than the Son. Listen to Philippians 2:5-7. *"Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men."* Here we see that although Jesus shared the form or nature of God, He did not regard this equality a thing to hold on to, and so set aside his rights and form so that he could enter this world as a man. The second person of the Trinity came to us incarnate in the flesh as the only begotten Son of God.

Here again are patterns of community for the Church. We are all spiritually equals in the Body of Christ. God dwells not only among us, but within us as well. And while we have different roles and functions within the body, we are all equally a part of it. This truth is illustrated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:12, which says, *"For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."* Nor should we consider ourselves better than another. There is to be a willingness to set aside our rights and prefer one another just as Christ did within the Trinity.

Having covered the patterns of community in the form of the Trinity at some length, let's move on to its expressions. There are a number of points in Scripture where we see the persons of the Trinity communicating and interacting. These expressions begin to define the relationships between the three persons of the Trinity; the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. First, let's look at the patterns of community as interactions between the persons of the Trinity.

The foremost interaction between the members of the Trinity is love. This aspect of their relationship is seen in Jesus' prayer in John 17:23-24. *"I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world."* In this prayer we see that the Father's love for the Son. A clear and essential element of the relationships within the Trinity is love. God has a great love for His Son and because of the Son, God extends that love to us. This should not surprise us given that 1 John 4:8 and 16 tells us that God is love.

Another interaction we see in scripture is the sending of the Son and Spirit. John 5:37 that says, *"And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me."* Again in John 8:18-19, Jesus says, *"I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me."* They said to him therefore, *"Where is your Father?"* Jesus answered, *"You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also."* Not only does God the Father bear witness to the Son, it is He who sends Him.

Similarly, in John 14:16 God the Father is the source the Spirit who is sent as our Helper. *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever".* And in verse 26, *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name".* These verses teach that God is not only the sender of the Jesus who secures our salvation, but the source of the Spirit who is the guarantor of our inheritance. The sending of the Spirit is also seen in John 15:26. *"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me."* Here we see Jesus, the Son, is also involved in working through the Spirit who flows out of the Father.

The last interaction I would like to highlight is the working of Father, Son, and Spirit. Again there are a number of verses where this is seen, but in the interest of time we will focus only on a few. Again in John, Chapter 6, verse 38, *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me."* The Father is working through the Son whom He sent to do His will. In the Son there is a perfect alignment and submission to the will of the Father.

Another such text is John 5:17-18. *"But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."* The unity and equality of the trinity is seen in the alignment of the work of the Father and the Son. The Father sends the Son to work as He is Himself is working. The Jews rightly understood that in His answer, He was claiming equality with God.

Just as the Father and the Son are at work, so Scripture clearly teaches that the Spirit is also a worker. One of the works of the Spirit is to give spiritual gifts to men. Listen for the three persons of the Trinity in 1 Corinthians 12 as Paul describes the giving of these gifts in verses 4 through 6. *"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone."* Paul then concludes in verse 11, *"All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills."* The Spirit is at work to distribute gifts to believers according to His will; but a will that is completely in unity to fully equip the Church for ministry. Another work of the Holy Spirit is sanctification. 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and 1 Peter 1:2 make reference to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who works within us, as a manifestation of God's love, for us to make us holy and grow toward maturity in our relationship with the God.

All of these passages reveal the dynamic nature and interaction of the holy community that is the Trinity. In addition to these interactions, we can also look at the nature of communication between the persons in the Trinity recorded in Scripture. It should not be any wonder that as communicating creatures made in God's image, that scripture would record His communication within the community of the Trinity.

There are a number of places we could turn, but let's start with Matthew 3. Please turn there and look at verses 13 to 17. Here you have a single scene with all three persons of the Trinity on display. *"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."* We see all three persons of the Trinity communicating and interacting in this passage. As Jesus is baptized the voice of God declares His great pleasure in the Son while the presence of the Spirit as a dove gives testimony that all three are in perfect harmony and unity at the launch of Jesus' ministry.

And a final verse from Luke 22:42 demonstrates the Son's submission to the Father. Here we read, *"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."* Here we see the singular devotion to God's will despite the suffering that is ahead. Christ's redemptive act is both the Father working through the Son and the Son doing the will and work of the Father. According to Hebrews 12:2, Jesus the Son suffered the shame and pain of the cross because of the joy of pleasing the Father. We also see Jesus' prayer to the Father the unity of the Trinity in the willing submission of the Son to the will of the Father.

We have looked both at the form of the Trinity and at several passages that demonstrate the interaction and communication between its members. These important truths should allow us to better understand the patterns of community thus established for the Church. Given these truths, as a believing and chosen community, there should therefore be a reflecting of and shaping after the divine community that we have seen and finds its pattern from the Trinity.

There are several reflecting patterns that we can draw out to apply to our community as believers. The first and perhaps foremost among these is the interaction of love between the Father and Son is to be one of the primary evidences of the community of believers. 1 John 4:7, *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God."* One of the hallmarks of Christian community is the deep love we are to have for one another. This love reflects the pattern of great love that the Father has for the Son and the Son for the Church. Our love for one another is not merely an act of obedience, but an image of the community we see in the Trinity. Our love for one another is an expression of our unity together and a witness to the world of God's love.

There is to be a preferring of one another just as Jesus pictured for us as He submitted to the will of the Father. This is seen in Philippians 2:4-5, which says *"Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus"*. We read from this same passage earlier of how Jesus was willing to set aside His rights to serve others.

In a world of individualism, one of the reflected patterns of our community is a willingness to set aside rights and even more so our preferences for the sake of serving others. We see this expressed in a different way in Ephesians 5:21 where Paul ends a series of commands to the church with this instruction, "*submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.*" The character of our community is to be one of self-sacrifice rather than self-serving that reflects the submission of Christ to the Father. It is willingly letting go of our agendas, our rights, our preferences and submitting them to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And finally, just as the Trinity is a community at work, we are to be a community at work. This is a kingdom work of ministry that is to permeate every aspect of our lives. The clear pattern of community we see is to labor together to do the will of God. It is not an option, nor is it a casual effort put forth only when it is convenient. It is an effort that perseveres when the work is hard and often is refined through the trials and sufferings of life. It is willing to expend both energy and emotion, the sweat and tears of community, that demonstrates a value for people, ministry, and God's glory in our midst. Our community is to daily reflect the sacrifices necessary to do the work of our holy calling.

As a community created in God's image, we here at the Chapel should not only reflect the pattern of community seen in the Trinity, we should be shaped by it as well. This shaping is by design and must be the intentional direction of our desire for our community. While it may seem simple, it is easy to lose sight of God's shaping us as the body of Christ. We are quick to forget who we are and diminish our community as believers to something far less that God intended. We are first and foremost a part of the Church, brothers and sisters in a community that will extend beyond the end of time. Thinking Biblically about this may require a change of beliefs that elevates the preeminence and priority of this community.

The first area that is shaped by the patterns we see in the Trinity is toward our unity. There is a oneness and harmony in the Godhead that should shape the quality and identity of our community. Just as all persons of the Trinity are equally a part of it, so every member of the body of Christ is equally a part as well. This unity and equality is echoed throughout 1 Corinthians 12. Listen for the patterns of community in the Trinity we have seen this morning as a read several verses from this passage. First verse 12, "*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.*" And again in verses 25 and 26, "*...that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*"

The call to unity as a community is also seen in Ephesians 4. Both verse 3 and 13 call the church to maintain the unity of the Spirit and of the faith. This unity is not the sense of sameness that may first come to mind. A careful reading of the 1 Corinthians 12 and other passages make it clear that we are to embrace and value the diversity that God has given to the church. But there is also to be a unity of doctrine and oneness of mind that is expressed in Philippians. Here Paul writes in 1:27 that he "*may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with **one mind** striving side by side for the faith of the gospel*". And a few verses later in Philippians 2:2, that they may "*complete my joy by **being of the same mind**, having the same love, **being in full accord and of one mind.***"

In Biblical terms, I believe this unity takes on many practical forms. It is giving one another the benefit of the doubt and assuming the best not the worst. It is working toward agreement rather than finding fault or being defensive when our wants and preferences are not met. It is a willing submission to others and the authority structures within the Chapel. It is a striving together to achieve the same goals, to build ministry, and to serve others. And it is a rejoicing and sorrowing together in the circumstances of life.

Turn to Ephesians 2:18-19. Here we read, "*For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God*". Notice that the all three persons of the Trinity are mentioned in this verse. The second area that we are being shaped in the pattern of the Trinity is toward being a holy people. As new creatures we are part of a new community and our ultimate home is not this world. We have been made strangers or aliens as part of the household of God. We will pick up this same theme as we look at the national community of Israel that are strangers wandering through the wilderness. We now belong to a heavenly kingdom and are set apart for a holy and high calling.

As a local body, this pattern is shaping us to place our treasures in Christ. This world has nothing to offer us both individually and as a community. Being strangers to the world means placing a high value on belonging to the community of Christ. It places a high view on baptism and the public proclamation of loyalty to Christ our King. It is a view that gazes along an eternal horizon that blots out the attractions and distractions of this world. And it is the amazing bond shared between believers that can only be explained by the presence of the Holy Spirit that unites us and places us in Christ.

The third area that is to be shaped by the patterns we see in the Trinity is a maturing of our community. The goal of community life together is a growing in obedience and knowledge of the Lord so that He is glorified. Turn ahead in Ephesians a few pages to 4:15-16. Speaking of our community, Paul writes, *“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”* God is at work in the Church, through the person of the Holy Spirit, to equip and build the church with an aim toward maturity; a maturity that we have in part here on earth, and will have perfectly in glory.

What does this look like in our midst? It is a high-view of scripture with a passion to preach the Word, that is, the whole counsel of scripture, that we may become mature in a faith and knowledge that leads us to love God, a love for one another, and a love for the lost. It is a corporate commitment to discipleship and one anothering that encourages and builds up our faith. It is a personal commitment to right doctrine and scripture that makes it supreme in our lives. It is an unwavering hope and knowledge that we will one day, by God’s grace, we be like Christ. This is the promise of 1 John 3:2, *“Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”*

Well, this has been a lot of material to cover is just a single message. While we have moved quickly through many passages, I hope you have gained or strengthened your sense of the patterns of community in the Trinity and their important implications. It is my hope that as you read passages in Scripture, you may see them a little differently or more fully. There is a sense of awe and wonder as you consider the patterns and designs that God has give us; that teach us and point us to the amazing nature of who God is.

In conclusion, let us consider a few challenges that this message should lead us to. First, do we value our community together? Does it have the importance and priority in our lives that Scripture calls us to.

Second, does seeing that the pattern for our community in the Trinity give us a greater appreciation for the community of believers? Is this an area where further personal study and meditation would be helpful?

Third, what are some practical ways that we can draw together and strengthen our sense of community here at the Chapel? Do you have a passion or gift for building community at the Chapel? If you do, please see me so that we can build a community here that draws people in and engages them in ministry.

Lastly, on a personal level, what can each of us do to more greatly reflect and be shaped by the patterns of community in the Trinity? What areas are obstacles in your own life that are preventing better community here at Clearcreek? What changes could you make to encourage others to unity, love, and labor in this ministry?

Let me close this morning by thanking God for His word and for allowing us to glimpse the majesty of the Trinity. We declare with Scripture that the Lord our God is one. We are thankful for the Father who is the author and source of our salvation. We are thankful for the Son, who secured our salvation and has given us life everlasting. And we are thankful for the Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance and is the indwelling presence of God within us. The three persons of Trinity are distinct, yet completely God; a holy community that provides important patterns that can and should shape and be reflected by our community today.

[Pray]