

## **“An Invitation to Dance”**

*Reading: Romans 5:1-5; John 16:7-15*

Written and preached by [Luke Richards](#)

Over the last several years I’ve found myself having pretty much the same conversation at different times and with different people. It’s often in the context of small talk with other pastors or ministry leaders, at a dinner or conference or something, and we ask one another about what we do, and I tell them that I’m a co-pastor with my wife, and sometimes the other person in the conversation kind of pauses — I can often tell when this is coming — and they say something like, “Huh. How does that work out? How do you handle conflict?” To which I usually reply that, well, if we disagree about something, we talk about it and work our way through it. And I can tell in a few of these conversations that it just hasn’t occurred to the other person that you could run a church like this. In their minds, I suspect, you *have* to have someone in charge, the buck has to stop somewhere, and having a situation where two people have equal authority is, to them, a recipe for gridlock and disaster. That’s not even getting to those people who probably think I’m a terrible husband and a disappointment of a man because I “let” my wife have so much power.

What I assume is going on in these conversations, I think, is that for some people, the church and the world in general *have* to be hierarchical in their structure. Someone always has to be in charge, someone has to have ultimate authority, someone has to be at the top of the pyramid, because their faith is so invested in elevating God’s sovereignty. Some theological traditions hold God’s sovereignty as the ultimate truth: the fact that God is sovereign is the most important characteristic of God. I’ve never done a scientific survey, but I’ve always suspected that if that’s your view of God, something like co-pastoring is going to be a hard pill for you to swallow. Someone always has to be in charge, because that’s how God works and that’s how God made the universe, so sharing authority is bound to cause problems. Oftentimes this kind of thinking seems to flow from God down to the church and into the family: God has all the authority, so the church needs someone with a strong hand in authority over it (almost always a man), and families also need a strong, authoritarian father in charge of them. Co-pastoring or egalitarian relationships in marriage just don’t fit, they think.

It’s certainly true that God is sovereign. God is the all-powerful Lord and Maker of all things, and we don’t want to fudge in our giving God all authority and glory. But God’s sovereignty is not the most important characteristic of God for us to understand, which is a claim some people would take issue with. The reason I make that claim with confidence, though, is because of our focus for today. Today is Trinity Sunday, the Sunday after we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Today we celebrate the unexpected revelation of God’s self to the church: the revelation that the Spirit is God, and Jesus is God, and the Father is God, but the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, the Spirit is not the Father, and there is only one God. It’s something we affirm but we can’t understand; you exist as one person with one nature, while God exists with one nature in three distinct persons. That defies our logic and our experience, and yet we know it to be true because God has shown it to us.

This doctrine of the Trinity is something we can diagram out and explain in great detail. We can talk about the ancient creeds and the heresies they were meant to reject, and we can do our best to come up with an intellectual understanding of this great mystery. There’s good reason to do so,

and it's important to have the best intellectual understanding of the Trinity that you can, but in some ways that misses the point. The church calendar does not set aside one Sunday each year to focus specifically on the Trinity in the setting of a classroom lecture, we focus on the Trinity in the setting of worship because it shows us something important about the God we serve.

We start getting to the core of the doctrine of the Trinity when we realize that it tells us that rather than being an authoritarian tyrant, God exists in an eternal embrace of love, a divine dance of self-giving. Right at the heart of God's nature, there is community, and it is specifically community without hierarchy, with pure equality, and with pure unity. That's why I insist that God's sovereignty is not the most important quality of God, because when you arrive at the Trinity, the deepest revelation of God's nature that has been given to us, you find a relationship of love. And in fact it's a love of a particular quality: a self-giving love of mutuality. That's why I've always loved the image of a divine dance, because it's an ever-moving embrace of enjoyment of the other in which sometimes one is facing you, sometimes another, and no one is really leading the others.

In fact it's heretical to claim that one Person of the Trinity is higher or more important than the others. It's tempting to see God the Father as the boss or chief God, but true Christianity has always insisted that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are coequal. Sometimes you hear someone try to elevate the Father over the others, because again, some people just can't handle the thought of no one being the boss, but that's heresy.

This is not just trivia, it's one of the deepest and grandest of Christian doctrines. It shows us that God is *for* us, and that He is completely for us. The Father, Son, and Spirit are united in their will, their purpose, and their love for us. Some people think that the Father is the angry, wrathful God of the Old Testament, always looking for someone to smite, and the Son is the nice, forgiving God of the New Testament who tells people to just be nice to one another, and He's willing to absorb all of His Father's rage onto Himself on the cross, and the Spirit is the calm, peaceful, mothering side of God. But that's a caricature of the truth: in John 16, Jesus says that the Father gives Him everything, and the Spirit receives it from Jesus, and then passes it on to us. The three Persons are united in self-giving. And likewise in our reading from Romans, where Paul describes how Jesus reconciles us to God, and the Spirit pours His love into our hearts.

We might take this as a reminder of the incomprehensibility of God, that God's very nature is something so far beyond us that we struggle for the words, and that's true. But maybe a more meaningful way to put it is to say that our difficulty comprehending the Trinity is instead an invitation to know God better. Like any relationship, there's room to grow and learn more about one another. Our God cannot be contained in any doctrine because He's alive and dynamic, and so He invites us into the dance to know Him better. Maybe the payoff of this doctrine for us is conversation, the back-and-forth of self-giving and gracious reception of the other, in which no one is leading or controlling, but only giving and receiving. Our Trinitarian God cuts right through our hierarchical understanding of the world and calls us to engage in relationships of genuine love, where there is no coercion, no self-glorification, but only mutuality and invitation.

Today we have a two-part response to the gift of God's self through the revelation of the Trinity. We begin by receiving the gift of God's self through the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The Trinity shows us that God is for us, and one of the ways we enact that promise is through receiving

the gift of the body and blood of Christ. God is not only for us in an abstract sense; Jesus Christ gave His life so that we could know life with God. So today we partake of the elements of communion as part of our acceptance of the invitation God has given us. We come to the table because Jesus has invited us.

But as God invites us to the dance, He also calls us to invite others. He is not only for us, He is for all those who have so far refused the invitation and remain lost in the darkness. So today as we walk up the aisle to receive the presence of God, I invite you to make it the beginning of a longer walk. Wherever you live, I encourage you to commit to going out into your neighborhood on a prayer walk at some point in the next few weeks. A prayer walk is exactly what it sounds like: praying for an area and the people living in it while you walk through it. Pray for the people living in the houses you pass, or the people working in the businesses you pass, or the people in cars driving past you. Pray for their struggles, their hurts, their burdens. Pray that they would respond to the invitation to God's dance, and to come further into the conversation with God and His people. Pray that God would open *your* eyes to what's going on around you, and give you opportunities to minister God's invitation to the people near you. Pray that God would break the strongholds of darkness, and that He would guide you and this church in challenging the gates of hell. I encourage you to make this a regular practice of yours. It doesn't have to be anything elaborate, but make it deliberate. If you can't go on a prayer walk, go on a prayer drive, or get on Google Maps and pray over your neighborhood that way. If you live in a neighborhood with other folks from this church, go on a prayer walk together. If you live somewhere that isn't conducive to walking, join up with someone in their neighborhood.

God reveals Himself to us because He is for us. Let's accept the invitation and pass it on.



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