

MATERIALS LIST:

- Andrei Rublev's Trinity icon
- Guitar
- Speakers for Mendelssohn Piano Trio
- Handouts of icon
- Bibles

LIFE STORY QUESTIONS:

- What was your favorite thing about elementary school?
- If you could go back in time to your elementary school self, what one thing would you tell him or her?

MENDELSSOHN'S PIANO TRIO

When I was in Minnesota visiting family in May, I received a wonderful gift of tickets to see the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra with my wife. The first piece they played was by 19th Century composer Felix Mendelssohn, "Piano Trio No. 1 in D Minor." Mendelssohn wrote the trio for piano, violin, and cello. We're going to listen for a little bit right now. What I want you to listen for especially is for times when the three instruments sound almost like one, all together, but then other times when you can hear distinct parts. (Hear this piece here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ShKb_nSYw)

At times the three instruments blended into one beautiful unity, at other times I could hear each distinctly. The program notes put it well, saying, "There is great equality among the voices, and their exchanges show Mendelssohn's gift for instrumental interplay." Equality, yet interplay. 1, yet 3. This is much like the Trinity, which we've been talking about for the last couple weeks.

WAS GOD EVER LONELY?

When I was little, I often wondered, didn't God get lonely before creating humans? If it is true, which I believe it is, that God *has always* existed, hasn't all that existing gotten boring by now? Or, at least, wasn't it boring before we human beings came on the scene to liven things up a bit? What did God do up there? I wondered.

THE TRINITY

Well, the idea of the Trinity that we've been talking about—and this is our third and final week on the Trinity—has some answers for us. This idea of the Trinity is central to our faith. Christians are baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. You will hear in the benediction at this church each week "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." Each Sunday as we bring our tithes and offerings to God, we "praise God

from whom all blessings flow, praise him all creatures here below, praise him above ye heavenly host, praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” And we sing in the *Gloria Patri*: “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost....”

Last week you looked with Dom at some verses in the Bible that show the Trinity. The word Trinity does not appear in the Old or New Testaments, but the idea of the Trinity is all over the pages of both testaments. Genesis 1:2 talks about the Spirit of God hovering over the waters. In Genesis 1:26 God says, “Let *us* make human beings in *our* image...,” which most Biblical scholars take to mean not the “royal we,” but a literal “we,” referring to the three persons of the Trinity. We also know from John 1 that Jesus the Son was present in creation and even before. John writes, “In the beginning was the Word [or, Jesus], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.” So from the very beginning of creation, even long before creation, God was Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We have the words of Jesus in John 10:30: “I and the Father are one.” And Jesus prays to the Father in John 17, “All I have is yours, and all you have is mine” (17:10), “You are in me and I am in you” (21), and, “We are one.”

So we say that God is **one God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit**. “One God” means that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all of the same substance, essence, stuff. Three persons has to do with the different parts they play—as you heard in the trio. The word “persons” also means that God is personal.

MORE ANALOGIES

Think, for example, about the Boston Celtics: Paul Pierce, Kevin Garnett, and Ray Allen. Three players, playing as one unit: once they got those three guys working together, they won the championship in 2008.

And Erica mentioned the water analogy to help us understand how one substance can be three persons. H₂O is one molecule or group of atoms: two Hydrogen atoms bonded to one Oxygen atom. Yet we see H₂O in three different ways: in liquid form it is water; in solid form it is ice; and in gaseous form it is steam.

Are there any musicians in here? [Ask, do any of you know what a triad is in music?] Three distinct notes, sounded at once to make one chord. You may hear it just as one chord, but the three notes are in there. Same kind of thing with the Trinity.

RUBLEV’S TRINITY ICON: GOD AS COMMUNION

(You can see the icon here:

http://skete.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=product.display&product_id=524)

This idea of interplay in the nature of God is fascinating to me. Though Mendelssohn's Piano Trio was 30 minutes long when I heard it in Minnesota, I never once got bored. The music was too beautiful for that. We've seen from Genesis and John that God was Father, Son, and Holy Spirit even before creation. There were three persons *living in community* together. And if you think about your immediate community you live with, your family, you know that living in community is anything but boring. So if we can think of a beautiful musical trio, or three persons living in affirming community... we start to get an answer to my childhood question. God was not bored before he created us. The three persons of the Godhead were in constant, joyous, life-giving community with each other.

Let's get visual with this idea of community for a moment.

In the early 1400s, a Russian painter and devout Christian named Andrei Rublev painted a famous icon called *The Icon of the Trinity*, which is what you have printed before you. This icon is also known as *The Hospitality of Abraham*, since it is based on one level on the story in Genesis 18 where Abraham and Sarah show hospitality to three angelic strangers who come to them to share the good news that they will have a son at long last. But the icon on a deeper level represents the three persons of the Trinity, sitting around a table together. The persons of the Trinity are here shown to be *in community* with each other.

(What are some things that you notice about this icon?)

- Identical faces on the three figures and an identical staff that each holds: Rublev shows that God is of one substance or essence.
- The same color robe is on each figure—blue. This common theme of blue in the robes shows the unity even in the diversity of persons...
- ...though Rublev also varies the clothing on each figure to highlight the three distinct persons of the Trinity.
- Their heads tilted at different angles and their hands making different gestures also show the diversity found among the Trinity.
- Yet Rublev shows that God is of one substance in that the three persons are seated around one cup and table. When we want to get to know a person better or deepen bonds of intimacy, that often takes place over a shared bite to eat, a cup of coffee, a dessert, or a full-blown lunch or dinner. This shows God's communal nature. So if *this* is going on long before the creation of the world, God would have *never* been bored or lonely.

AND YET... THE MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY REMAINS

Well, at the end of all this, these things help us understand the Trinity, but there may still be things left we don't understand. Erica made a great point the other week—she doesn't understand everything about how her car works, but she still puts her faith in it to get her to where she needs to go. We may not totally understand everything about the Trinity, but that's okay! There is a mysterious part of this. The apostle Paul writes, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

SO WHAT? PART I: WE HAVE COMMUNION WITH GOD

So what about us? Where do we fit in all this?

God invites us into this communion of the Trinity, into this meal, into this relationship. Jesus prays in John 17:21, "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us."

In writing about the communal nature of God, author, Episcopal priest, and my own father, Tim Jones, writes, "...[The Trinity isn't] a clique, doesn't turn inward upon itself; it overflows. It spreads out into an embracing larger whole, inviting others (like you and me!) in, saying come on *over*." ...God is used to conversation. Used to dialogue. ...*ready*. This God invites me, in fact, to join in on a conversation already going on, one that has been going on for a very, very long time." God is personal. God is all about relationships. Look at that picture. That is an essential part of who God is. And he invites us into that relationship, so we can share it with him.

SO WHAT? PART II: WE SHARE THIS COMMUNION, TOO

So we are invited into the communion and relationship of the Trinity. And God calls us, too, to invite others in to this relationship. There are lots of ways we can do that, and today we'll focus on one way: serving others by sharing a meal with them.

Just as God is shown here sharing a meal, sharing his life, we need to share what we have been given with others. We need to share the love of this God with others. Remember, the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is not a holy clique. Neither should we be. We can't just stay inside church all the time. That's not all we were intended to do. We can't keep God's love all for ourselves. The Bible tells us if we love God, we will love other people. If we don't love other people, we don't really love God.

Let's look up Ephesians 5—I want us to have a couple short verses before us as we get ready to do serve at the Community Dinner:

¹ Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children. ^{2b} Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ.