

During this time of Covid isolation, I've been re-reading *The Chronicles of Narnia*, written by C.S. Lewis. In it, four siblings—Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy—are magically transported to a new world where they discover talking animals, giants, dwarfs, and the like. But chief among their discoveries is a great lion (a kind of Christ-figure) by the name of Aslan; Aslan created Narnia, singing it into existence. Aslan is Lord of Narnia, He's always present, but not always seen or felt.

In the fourth book, Lucy is transported to Narnia from England; it's her second time in this world. What Lucy wants more than anything is to see Aslan again, when they finally do meet, Lucy notices something right away. Reading now,

“‘Alslan,’ said Lucy, ‘you’re bigger.’ ‘That is because you are older, little one,’ answered he. ‘Not because you are [bigger]?’ [Lucy asked. Aslan responded,] ‘I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.’”<sup>1</sup>

Lewis used story to convey a profound spiritual reality. God is unchangeable in His being and attributes. God is perfectly complete, and thus, He doesn't “grow;” He isn't more holy, loving, or wise than He once was. But, as we walk with Him, our knowledge and experience of Him can, and does, grow. In every season of life, as we turn to God, we can discover that He is “bigger” so to speak; He is more holy, more loving, and more wise than we previously knew. God is all- sufficient for every season of our lives—for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health.

This morning we are continuing in our preaching series entitled, *Describing God*. This series aims to achieve the basic purpose of theology, namely, to describe God's being, character, and activity.

Last week I set out to describe God as He is in Himself, what theologians refer to as the Immanent Trinity, or, the inner life and being of God. On the basis of God's revelation of Himself—through the Scripture, and, through the sending of the Son, and the Spirit—Christians throughout the centuries have confessed that there is only one God, and that this One God exists eternally in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Last week I described this One God as a *Communion of Persons*. I said that Father, Son, and Spirit enjoy a relationship unlike anything we have ever known, and for which every analogy falls woefully short. There is in God a perfect unity of being, purpose, will, thought, emotion, and activity. There is in God perfect understanding, perfect trust, perfect delight, other-centeredness, and love. In God there is not even the smallest hint of disagreement, jealousy, or separation. All of this describes God's being, His inner life, who He is in Himself.

I want to continue our conversation about the Trinity this week, shifting the focus from God's inner life (being), to God's activity; this is what theologians refer to as the *Economic Trinity*. The word “economic” comes from the Greek word *oikonomikos*, and it refers to the arranging of activity, or, to the managing of shared work. Using the terms *Immanent* and *Economic* in relation to the Trinity allows us

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian (Book 4)*.

to make an important distinction between who God is and what God does.

But the danger, of course, in using these terms is that we might create the impression that what the Trinity *is* can be separated from what the Trinity *does*—nothing could be further from the truth. My sermon this morning really has one solitary point: *who God is in Himself, He is for us*. It's no exaggeration to say that everything hangs on this truth. I trust that before I'm done this morning, you'll see what I mean.

**The Congruence Between God's Being and Action:** I want to begin by exploring the congruence between God's Being and Action, and explain why this is such good news for us. Perhaps a few illustrations will clarify.

Don Cherry is a Canadian Sports Broadcasting icon; Hockey Night in Canada and Don Cherry have been synonymous for decades. Cherry's voice is loud, his personality is loud, even his suit jackets are loud. What made Cherry must-watch-tv was his bombastic, contrarian, opinions—love him or hate him, Canadians tuned in to listen to him. But how much of what we saw and heard was the *real* Cherry, and how much was a persona that he crafted over decades?

Or consider the pro wrestler. When the light go on, the tights go on, and the face paint. Wrestlers assume a character and play to the crowd; they are one thing in public and quite another in private. *And at times, could the same thing not be said of us?*

One Friday night when I was 17, my younger brother Chris and I went to our Youth Group; it was a Guys Night and we spent the

evening playing football on the beach. Two other brothers, Rob and Gregg were there, good friends of ours, and after Youth Group was finished, we were looking for something to do. A few of the girls from the Youth Group were having a sleepover and the four of us decided to descend on the host home, under the cover of night, and toilet paper the front yard. As we were making our plans, another guy—Tim—decided to tag along.

We stopped by the local Save-On to stock up on essentials: toilet paper was a must, but we also picked up some peanut butter, and honey; you'll see why in a moment.

We parked a number of streets away, slinking around like feral cats, keeping away from street lights, keeping our conversation to a whisper. When we arrived at the home, the light was on in the living room and the curtain was drawn; we quickly and silently got to work. A few of us started wrapping toilet paper around the trees and railing, while a few of us approached their van, smearing peanut butter on the mirrors, and dumping honey on the windshield.

After a few minutes we stole away to a nearby ditch, watching to see if anyone had seen us. We were in the clear, but we had a few rolls of toilet paper left, and not wanting said paper to go to waste, we approached the house for a second time. But no sooner had we stepped onto the property, when we heard a voice behind us yell: *Hey! What are you kids doing?!*

The neighbour from across the street was standing on his second floor balcony. We dropped the toilet paper and began to run and moments later the neighbour was on the street chasing after us. Rob and Gregg, Chris and I were soccer players; we were in good shape

and used to sprinting. Tim, however, wasn't a soccer player, and he wasn't in shape. 100 meters into the chase, Tim began to labour: *"Hey guys, I can't keep running, I've got to slow down and walk."* I couldn't believe my ears...slow down and walk? We're being chased by an adult! *"You're on your own,"* I yelled. Chris, Rob, and Gregg were right on my heels; we jumped over fences, crawled through bushes, and eventually ended up back at our car.

A few minutes later, Tim showed up. *"What happened?"*, we asked. It turns out that the neighbour chasing us wasn't a soccer player either; when Tim slowed to walk, so did the neighbour, and he never got any closer. Two days later, at church, Mr. L came up to Rob and Gregg and asked, *"Was it you who toilet papered my house?"*; they denied all involvement in the incident. My brother and I were never approached because we had a reputation of being "good" boys.

What's the point of my story? Both then, and now, I'm not nearly as "good" as people think. I made a mess, left a friend to fend for himself, and then pretended that I wasn't involved. Sorry Mr. L!

When we are caught doing something inappropriate, we might excuse our behaviour saying, *"I don't know why I did that...it wasn't really me."* By which, of course, we mean *"I'm not like this all the time,"* or, *"In this situation, my actions didn't reflect who I want to be."* Here's the thing, **what we do reveals who we are.** However hard we may try to divide our private and public lives, the wall cannot hold forever—the dam will break; **what's inside always comes out.**

The same is true for God, and this is very good news! God's own being, who He is in Himself, is the source of all that He says

and does. Paraphrasing Psalm 86:10, *"God, You are great, and what You do is great"*. Of course! God is perfectly good, holy, and loving, and so, quite naturally, what He says and does is good, holy, and loving. In God there is no distinction between who He is and who He wants to be.

This is this good news because we never have to guess what we're going to get when we deal with God. Loving one day, but callous and cruel the next? Hardly. Hebrews 13:8 says, *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever,"* and what is true of Him is equally true of the Father and the Spirit.

Who this One God is, in Himself—a Communion of Persons, who share unbroken trust, perfect delight, other-centered love—this is who He is for us. God has opened His Trinitarian life to us.

**The Trinitarian Shape of Salvation:** I want to shift gears now and begin to talk about the way God is at work in the world. Because God is One, and Yet Three, His activity is both unified (as opposed to haphazard) and Trinitarian in its shape. It's not as though the Father created the world while the Son and the Spirit were reclining on deck chairs. It's not as though the Son took care of salvation, while the Spirit and Father were enjoying a glass of fine wine. In every work of God, Father, Son, and Spirit all participate, yet, their specific roles in the work is often distinguishable from the other.

As we think about the God who is for us, and the work He has done to include us in His life, I want to explore the Trinitarian shape of salvation. And if you have a Bible with you, I want to invite you to turn with me to Ephesians 1:3-14.

*“3 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. 4 Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. 5 God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. 6 So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son.*

*7 He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. 8 He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding. 9 God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan. 10 And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth. 11 Furthermore, because we are united with Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance, and he makes everything work out according to his plan. 12 God’s purpose was that we Jews who were the first to trust in Christ would bring praise and glory to God.*

*13 And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago. 14 The Spirit is God’s guarantee that he will give us the inheritance he promised and that he has purchased us to be his own people. He did this so we would praise and glorify him.*

In vs. 9, 10, and 11 Paul uses the word the Greek word for

“economy,” in order to describe God’s work of salvation. Remember, when used in this way, “economy” refers to *the arranging of activity*, or, *the managing of shared work*. In most English translations, the concept of economy has been translated as “plan” in order to convey the intended meaning. God’s salvation is not haphazard; He is supremely capable to devise and implement His plan. Further still, this plan of salvation reveals God as He is in Himself—Father, Son, and Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

The Father initiates salvation (**He chooses and adopts—vs. 4, 5**), the Son accomplishes salvation (**He redeems—vs. 7**), and the Spirit applies salvation (**He marks us as belonging to God—vs. 13**).

Vs. 3 functions like a topic sentence, setting the stage for all that follows. God the Father has poured out every blessing of the Spirit on those who are in Christ, and verses 4-14 explore the breadth and depth of these blessings. In the time remaining, I’m going to make my way through Paul’s hymn of praise, naming each blessing—as I do, allow your heart to be drawn to worship. Here’s the first...

**1. In Christ the Father chooses us (vs. 4).** More often than not, choice implies two realities: freedom and love. We choose between options, and more often than not, our choices reveal who, and what, we love.

Vs. 4 tells us that the Father loved us, and chose us in Christ, before the creation of the world. God chose you because you bring Him pleasure, and, because your life is a part of His glorious plan.

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<sup>2</sup> Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: how the Trinity Changes Everything*, 130.

**2. Second, in Christ the Father adopts us (vs. 5).** In the New Testament, the use of the word “adoption” is unique to Paul.<sup>3</sup> Vs. 4 says *that* God the Father chose us in Christ; vs. 5 tells us *what* we have been chosen for—to be His sons and daughters.

In Roman society, when a son was adopted, he moved into the family home, he was given the family name, any outstanding debts were paid in full, and he stood in line to receive his father’s inheritance.<sup>4</sup> An adopted son or daughter had the same legal position as a natural born child—they were “*real*” sons/daughters.

The same is true of us. Jesus is God’s Son by nature, the rest of us have been adopted into the Father’s family. And the love we enter into is the love that the Father has for Jesus the Son. Not that the Father loves the Son and now also loves us, but that the Father loves us in the Son; we are loved to the same degree as Jesus.

All of us have felt the pain of rejection. Companies reject employees and employees companies. Friends reject friends. Husbands reject wives and wives reject husbands. Parents reject children and children parents. To a person, we seek the security of a rejection-free-relationship. Only one such relationship exists—we have been chosen by God, and adopted into His forever-family.

**3. Third, in Christ we are redeemed and forgiven (vs. 7-8).** Paul writes, “*7 He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our*

*freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. 8 He has showered his kindness on us*”.

Redemption expresses the heart of God—though we are captive to sin, and thoroughly broken, He seeks us still. To redeem is to purchase something or someone that would otherwise be lost, imprisoned, or destroyed. Jesus offered His life as a payment, releasing us from captivity.

He reached out to us when we were unable to reach out to Him. To speak about the “*riches of God’s grace*” is to speak of abundance. His mercy, forgiveness, and love is overflowing in measure. He is not the God of *just enough*; there is no end to His supply.

**4. Fourth, in Christ we are included in God’s new people (vs. 12-13).** Ephesians speaks not only about new life in Jesus, but about God’s world-wide family—the Church. When we are ushered into relationship with the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit, we are bound together: Asians, Africans, Europeans, Russians, Kiwis, Aussies, North and South Americans—male and female, young and old, rich and poor.

**5. Finally, in Christ the Spirit seals us for eternity (vs. 13-14).**

No one gives like God gives, and the best gift He can give, is the gift of Himself. The Father gave the Son, the Son gave up His life, and the Spirit comes to indwell us, God’s own empowering presence.

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<sup>3</sup> Paul mentions adoption is mentioned five times: Romans 8:15, 23; Romans 9:4; Galatians 4:5; and Ephesians 1:5.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Lyall, *Roman Law in the Writings of Paul--Adoption*, 83.

Because of the Spirit's presence within, we can know peace and joy, in difficulty, we can experience God's strength in midst of weakness, and wisdom in the face of complexity. And the Holy Spirit reminds us, from the inside, that we are loved by God.<sup>5</sup>

In vs. 13-14 Paul writes, "*When you believed, you were marked in [Christ] with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession*". The Spirit is described as being both a seal and a deposit.

In ancient times, official letters were marked with a seal before they were sent. When a recipient received the letter and saw the seal—the mark of the sender was recognized and the authenticity of the letter was confirmed. We have been sealed, we have been marked with God's Indwelling Presence, the promised Holy Spirit. The Spirit's presence is the sure sign that we belong to God, that we have been chosen, adopted, saved.

And Paul goes on to talk about the Spirit functioning like a deposit; Paul is drawing upon a metaphor that still makes sense today. A major transaction is often secured by an initial payment—a first instalment—guaranteeing that the rest will come.

The Holy Spirit's presence in you, in me, in the Church, is God's guarantee that He will make good on all of His promises. There is more to come.

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:15-16.

<sup>6</sup> Darrell Johnson, *Experiencing The Trinity*, 53.

**Conclusion:** If Jesus is the centre of salvation, then the Father is the source, and the Holy Spirit is the One who is at work applying this great salvation to every nook and cranny of our lives. Darrell Johnson writes, "**The God who has claimed us for himself is Father, Son and Holy Spirit...God is God *for us*—Father. God is God *with us*—Son. God is God *in us*—Spirit.**"<sup>6</sup>

God has opened His Trinitarian life to us, it is for us to enter in, to participate, to receive, and to worship in awe and wonder. God is Good, He is Love, He is Holy, and all that He is in Himself, He is for us.

## Worship

### Invitation to Virtual Foyer and Prayer Room

As our service comes to a close, I want to remind you that in a few minutes we will be opening our virtual foyer...it's a time to gather virtually to chat with other folks from our church.

I also want to remind you that if you would like to receive prayer this morning, members from our prayer ministry team—Wendy and Craig, or, Rachel and Christian—will be waiting in our virtual prayer room to pray for you. If you would like to be prayed for, please send an email to [prayerlink@nsac.bc.ca](mailto:prayerlink@nsac.bc.ca); it will generate an automatic link to the prayer room.

**Benediction:** May the Father bless you and keep you; the Son make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, may the Spirit turn His face towards you and give you peace.