

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31 – June 16, 2019 (Trinity Sunday)

So I was sitting home alone several years ago when the doorbell rang. Now for most of you, this would be the kind of visitor to your home that you dread. The type of visitor that you might try to hide from. The type of visitor that, even if you did open the door, your only response would probably be, “Go away,” or some kinder variant thereof.

But not for me. And not for many pastors, in fact. For this was the type of visitor that many trained theologians relish receiving at their door. The type of visitor that makes pastors feel like a boxer being offered a title fight. Or a Triple-A pitcher being called up to the majors. For this was a pair of young Jehovah’s Witnesses who had unwittingly knocked on the door of a Lutheran pastor.

And it started off really quite well. We discussed sin. We discussed the resurrection of the dead. We discussed the fall of man. We discussed the function of the church. And we were really in remarkable agreement. But I knew that it was only a façade. As important as the issues were that we were discussing, there was something far more important going unsaid.

And so when they said, “We’ve asked you a lot of question. Do you have any questions for us?” I took the opportunity and asked a question that I knew the answer to quite well, “Do you believe that Jesus Christ was God made flesh? Do you believe in the Trinity?” And the conversation that followed, while still very friendly and polite, contained far less agreement between us.

The Trinity. It’s one of those tenets of the faith that we often take for granted. Many Christians dismiss the importance of it altogether. “Well, sure, there’s a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” they’ll say, “But it doesn’t really matter that much. The Bible says, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.’ That’s all that matters. Believe in Jesus. Everything else is just icing on the cake.”

And while it’s true that faith in Jesus Christ is the central component of the Christian faith, it’s also problematic to say that all you need is to believe in Jesus. Because at the core of that statement is really another question: Who is Jesus?

Because if you’re going to put your faith in someone or something, you need to know something about them. If a complete stranger off the street walked up to you and said, “Follow me to my house and I’ll give you a million dollars.” You’d probably turn and walk the other direction. If a complete stranger pulled up to your child and said, “Get into my car and I’ll buy you an ice cream cone.” You’d call the police. It’s creepy. It’s suspicious.

So now Jesus Christ comes up to us and says, “Put your faith in me and I’ll give you eternal life.” How should we respond? If we don’t know who Jesus is, that offer is at best meaningless.

And at worst, it’s a pretty dubious attempt at getting us to sacrifice our lives for an uncertain reward. So it’s all well and good to say, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” But a faith in Jesus that isn’t resting on a firm assurance of who he is... is pretty empty.

And that’s where we and Jehovah’s Witnesses have a problem. Because although they may say they put their faith in the Lord Jesus, the two of us look at Jesus Christ and we see two completely different people. The two of us look at God and see two completely different gods.

Now to be fair, the way they look at Jesus and the way they look at God is reasonable to a degree. After all, Moses tells us, “The Lord our God is one.” St Paul tells us, “There is one God and Father of us all.” And Jesus describes himself not as the Father, but as the Son, and very distinctly different from the Father because of that.

So, in a way, it's perfectly reasonable to conclude that Jesus is different from God. It is logical to decide that he is less than God. That he has a divine mission and divine power granted to him, but he is fundamentally of a different substance than God himself. And that is exactly what the Jehovah's Witnesses have concluded.

But it's a faulty conclusion. One that ignores Jesus' own statements about His divinity. Take our Gospel lesson today. Jesus is arguing with the Jews, who claim he is a liar and even demon possessed, while Jesus insists that he is simply honoring his Father by doing the Father's work. And that work is something that even Abraham rejoiced in seeing.

They still don't understand. How can a 33 year old man claim to have seen Abraham. And so Jesus makes it clearer to them. *"I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am!"*

I Am. The very name that God used to describe himself on Mt Sinai. Yahweh: the one who is. In fact, the very title "Lord Jesus" points directly to the Lord of the Old Testament. When you proclaim "Jesus Christ is Lord," by the power of the Holy Spirit, you proclaim, "Jesus is Yahweh." Jesus is Jehovah. Jesus is God.

How can this be? How can the son be the same as and equal to the father? I don't know. I can't explain it. But I think our Old Testament lesson gives us a clue. For in this description of the Wisdom of God, we see an image created of the Son of God.

Which makes sense in a way. The wisdom of God and the Word of God are really the same concept. One is God's plan. The other is God expressing and carrying out that plan. It's the same thing. Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. Jesus is the Wisdom of God put into action. This passage is a description and prophecy of Jesus.

And while the ESV translation that we have in bulletins is good, I actually prefer the NIV's translation of this passage: *"The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began."* Now at first glance, it seems like this is saying that Jesus is a creation. Something less than God.

And yet, take note of those words: *"appointed from eternity."* The Son is a work of the Father, but an eternal work of the Father. There is no point in the past where you can find God the Father and not find God the Son. Likewise, we know that this is "from the beginning." Who was also there "from the beginning?" Genesis 1:1... the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. All there "from the beginning." All there "from eternity." And yet, somehow, the Son is "begotten." And somehow, the Spirit does "proceed from the Father and the Son." How is this possible? I haven't a clue. It's not reasonable. It's not logical.

But maybe that's a good thing. I was watching a movie the other day. And there's a conversation in it where the characters are arguing over the existence of God. One fiercely convinced that there is a God. The other two just as convinced that there isn't.

And one of the atheists finally says, "Your God is nothing but a human invention. He's just an old guy with a white beard floating in the clouds. He looks and acts just like a human being because he came out of your head." It's an interesting statement. If it were true, he'd be absolutely right.

But he's dead wrong. That isn't what our God looks like. Not at all. The eternal Triune God doesn't look anything like us. God is a complete paradox. He looks like nothing we've ever seen. One God in three person. A son who is begotten of his father but not made.

Who can simultaneously be perfectly just and perfectly merciful, even when those two attributes seem to be in complete contradiction of each other. Who is complete spirit, immortal, invisible, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent.

And yet, at the same time, who is flesh and blood and eats and sleeps and laughs and cries and lives and dies. Who was made flesh and dwelt among us. Who loves us and sacrifices himself for us. Who died on the cross and rose from the dead.

God is everything we can't describe made flesh in a man we can describe. He does a work that exceeds our comprehension and yet comes to us in ordinary elements like water and bread and wine. Don't try to make sense of it. You won't be able to. And that's a good thing. Because it means he exceeds anything that the mind of man could invent.

It is this God in whom we put our trust. It is this God in whom we put our faith and know that we will be saved. It is this God that we proclaim when we say, "Jesus Christ is Lord." I know who the Lord Jesus is because I know the power of my God. And I know my God because I know the love of Jesus Christ. Amen.