

“Trinity and Humanity, Unity and Diversity”
Genesis 1:26-28, Matthew 28:16-20, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
May 31, 2026
Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service
Pastor Nicoletti

The Reading of the Word

Today we come to the first Sunday after Pentecost, a Sunday that has come to be called “Trinity Sunday.” And while this day in the church calendar is a more recent development, it is, I think, helpful as a Sunday when we can especially focus on the doctrine of the Trinity, and its implications for us.

So, our topic today will be the Trinity: the Biblical teaching that God is one God in three persons.

And specifically, today I want to think about the implications of this biblical teaching for our understanding of what it means for humanity to be made in the image of God.

We will hear from several texts this morning, two now, and then one final passage from 1 Corinthians a little later. But all three are printed for you in the bulletin. As we hear from the first two, please do listen carefully. This is God’s Word for us this morning.

First, from Genesis 1, we read about God’s making of humanity:

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

And then, from Matthew 28. This next passage takes place after Jesus’s death and resurrection, and right before he ascends to heaven. And in it Jesus refers to the triune nature of God. We read:

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let's pray ...

Prayer of Illumination

Lord,
Grant that we might meditate this morning
on your heavenly mysteries,
and so grow in true faith and devotion to you,
for your glory and for our good.
Grant this we ask, in Jesus's name.
Amen.
[Based on John Calvin's prayer before his lectures on Ezekiel]

Introduction

So we have two passages here, which intersect on our theme today. And to help us get at that theme, I'll be drawing a good deal this morning from the work of the early 20th century Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck, along with Bavinck scholar James Eglinton.

And as we consider these texts, with some help from Bavinck, what I want to consider is that: Because God is triune, unity and diversity are at the heart of who God is, and therefore unity and diversity are essential to creation which points to the Triune God, to humanity which bears the image of the Triune God, and to the life of the Church which is the people of the Triune God.

Let me say that again: Because God is triune, unity and diversity are at the heart of who God is, and therefore unity and diversity are essential to creation which points to the Triune God, to humanity which bears the image of the Triune God, and to the life of the Church which is the people of the Triune God.

Let's break that down together.

God is Triune

First, God is triune.

As Christians, we affirm that the Bible teaches that there is one God, and that there are also three distinct persons in God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And the Father is fully God, and the Son is fully God, and the Holy Spirit is fully God, but there are not three Gods, but only one God.

Or, as the Athanasian Creed puts it:
We worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity,
neither blending their persons
nor dividing their essence.
For the person of the Father is a distinct person,
the person of the Son is another,
and that of the Holy Spirit still another.
But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one,
their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.

This is a mystery, but it is the biblical teaching we celebrate today: that the God who made us, the God who saved us, the God who reigns over this world, is one God, and three persons.

That is the Christian God. That is the doctrine of the trinity.

The Christian God is triune. That's the first thing we need to see this morning.

Unity and Diversity Are at the Heart of Who God Is

Second, we need to see that: Because God is triune, unity and diversity are at the heart of who God is.

The Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit is not the Father. These three identities are not just three different hats that one person named "God" wears at different times. The Bible is clear, and the Christian tradition is clear, that these are three distinct, different, and therefore, in a sense, diverse persons within the Godhead.

And God has always been this way. It's core to who he is.

It's not that there is some plain vanilla "God-ness" to start, and then some extra ingredients were added to different portions of God to make the three persons – God, in his essential nature, has always been and will always be three persons.

Now, we can get focused on the numbers here: the one in three and three in one. And certainly there's a lot to consider there.

But Herman Bavinck also encourages us to think more broadly. Beyond the specifics of three in one and one in three, Bavinck points out that the eternal triune nature of God means that in God – in his very nature, there is "unity in diversity" and "diversity in unity." [*Reformed Dogmatics* (RD) 2.331]

We often set unity and diversity apart – even at odds with each other. But, as Bavinck points out, in the Christian God those two things come together. There is a unity of essence or substance: there is only one God. But there is a diversity of persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In God there is “unity in diversity, diversity in unity.”

And Bavinck wasn’t using these as buzz words or to allude to popular political statements. Bavinck wrote about this 120 years ago – long before diversity was cool. He didn’t put these categories forward because they were trendy, but because he was a Christian theologian. And one key thing he saw in the nature of the Triune God, and then reflected in everything God made and everything God does, is this concept of unity in diversity, and diversity in unity.

Because that dynamic is at the heart of God himself.

That’s the second thing we need to recognize here: That because God is triune, unity and diversity are at the heart of who God is.

And that fact will then have implications for creation, humanity, and the Church.

Unity and Diversity Are Essential to Creation, Which Points to the Triune God

First, because creation points to our triune God, unity and diversity are essential to creation.

The Apostle Paul tells us that the world around us points to the God who made it. He writes that God has shown himself to all people, because “his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.” [Romans 1:19-20]

The Psalmist puts it like this – he writes:

The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.

[...]

Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

[Psalm 19:1-4]

God made the world. And he filled it with things that point to him and reveal who he is. And we can discuss many attributes of God that are displayed in creation. But one of those attributes, Bavinck argues, is this unity and diversity that is part of God’s trinitarian nature.

God, Bavinck claims, created the world in a way that would display this aspect of his nature, so that in creation, he writes: “there is a unity that does not destroy but rather maintains diversity, and a diversity that does not come at the expense of unity, but rather unfolds it in its riches.” [RD 2.436]

And we see this at so many levels of the created world. In chemistry, the diverse particles of protons, neutrons, and electrons unite to make atoms and elements. Diverse atoms unite to make molecules and compounds. Diverse compounds unite into mixtures, and so on.

In biology, diverse organelles unite to form cells, and diverse cells unite to form organs, and diverse organs unite to form complex lifeforms. And diverse lifeforms of various complexity unite to create complex ecosystems, in which diverse animals and plants and bacteria, and fungi, and more, interact with each other in beautiful ways, creating a unity that depends on biodiversity and a biodiversity that thrives in a balanced unity.

Look up at the sky, and in astronomy we are reminded of the relationship between our planet, our sun, and our moon, and other diverse astronomical elements, which unite to form a solar system, which then unite with other diverse solar systems to form a galaxy, and so on.

Over and over again throughout creation, God creates diverse things and unites them in astounding ways. Unity and diversity are everywhere in the world God has made.

Now, to be clear, none of these aspects of creation are true analogies of God's triune nature, because in each, the diverse elements are only a part of the united whole they make up, while each person of the trinity is also fully God. So they're not true analogies. Finite creation perhaps cannot contain a true analogy of the trinity.

But what God does give us in creation are revelations of the truth that at the heart of God exists a unity in diversity, and a diversity in unity. That is the aspect of God's triune nature that we see revealed over and over again, all around us.

Because God is triune, unity and diversity are at the heart of who God is, and therefore unity and diversity are essential to creation, which points to the Triune God.

Unity and Diversity Are Essential to Humanity, Which Bears the Image of the Triune God

All of creation points to the Triune God. But the Bible tells us that one aspect of creation bears the image of God in a special way: humanity.

As we heard from Genesis 1, God made humanity in his image.

And this dynamic of unity in diversity and diversity in unity, Bavinck argues, is also at work in the image of God in humanity. Because for humanity to rightly bear God's image, it takes a diversity of human beings.

This, Bavinck explains, is why God did not stop at creating Adam, but God also made Eve – making them male and female, sharing the same nature, but also different and diverse from each other. But God didn't stop there in creating human diversity. Because next, God called on them to unite in their diversity and thus to multiply – to multiply so much that they would fill the entire

earth with different and distinct and diverse humans who still share the same human nature. And this subsequent human diversity is part of humanity bearing God's image.

Bavinck explains it like this – he writes: “The image of God is much too rich for it to be fully realized in a single human being, however richly gifted that human being may be. It can only be somewhat unfolded in its depth and riches in a humanity counting billions of members. Just as the traces of God are spread over many, many works, in both space and time, so also the image of God can only be displayed in all its dimensions and characteristic features in a humanity whose members exist both [...] one after the other and [...] side by side.” [RD 2.577]

What is Bavinck saying?

Well, he's saying that it takes a mind-boggling diversity of humanity to properly unfold the image of God. Men aren't enough. Women aren't enough. You need both. But it doesn't stop there. One race isn't enough. You need a rich diversity of races. And one culture isn't enough. Culture shapes how people think, and speak, and act, and live. American culture isn't enough to unfold the full human capacity for showing forth God's image. You also need Brazilian culture. And French culture. And Korean culture. And Malawian culture. And so many more. Of course every culture is fallen, every culture has flaws, but every culture also has some elements that bring out aspects of human nature that others might not – and when those different cultures shape people in different ways, they bring out diverse elements in people that help humanity as a whole to more fully bear God's image.

And it extends to personality traits as well. Extroverts aren't enough to bear God's image – we need introverts too. Neurotypicals aren't enough to bear God's image, we need neurodivergents. Engineers aren't enough to bear God's image, we also need poets and dancers. And not only do we need these different kinds of people, but we need them in a diversity of life situations and relationships to each other. The engineer who's married to an accountant and the engineer who's married to an interpretive dancer will each become a different kind of person, shaped by their closest relationships, which will develop and draw out something of God's image in a unique way. Similarly, the child raised by one set of parents will become a different kind of person than the same child raised by a very different set of parents. And each arrangement further unfolds the image of God. Then add to that the diversities of different towns and cities, and cultures, and nations, and centuries a person can be born into.

The combinations are mind-boggling, but they go on and on, and Bavinck argues that they are part of God's creational intent – to create an incredibly diverse humanity that unfolds his image in an incredibly rich set of ways.

But, of course, it's not only about diversity. It's also about unity. God made humanity with the intention that it would be united under his reign – that relationships between these different people would be rich and deep – that in addition to a unity of nature, which still exists across humanity – there would also be a unity of love, a unity of purpose, a unity of glory.

And we know this was God's intention for humanity because we see that God will restore such unity at the end of history, in the Book of Revelation.

There, when God gives John a vision of the future that God intends to bring about, John says: “I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’ [Revelation 7:9-10]

A diverse multitude, united, crying out in one voice, to their triune God.

God made humanity to bear his image. And part of that means that God intended for humanity to be both united, and also incredibly diverse, with that diversity and unity unfolding God’s image in countless ways, showing forth who God is and what he is like throughout creation, as humanity fills the earth.

Unity and Diversity Are Essential to the Church, Which Is the People of the Triune God

This was God’s intention for humanity. But, of course, sin and rebellion entered the world. And it shattered this unity. And in sin, humanity set unity and diversity in opposition, as enemies to each other. In the hands of sinful human beings, unity became sufficient grounds for stomping out or subjugating diversity. Or diversity became motivation for shattering rightful human unity.

In sin, human unity and diversity were deeply marred and twisted and set at odds.

But then Jesus came to save and restore humanity to what God had meant it to be. And part of that restoration meant restoring the combination of unity and diversity among his people – the unity and diversity that God has always intended for humanity. That is what Paul tells us in our third scripture passage, from 1 Corinthians 12, printed for you in the bulletin. Take a look at it, and hear it now.

The Apostle Paul, speaking metaphorically about the Church in its unity and diversity, writes:

¹²For 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. ¹³For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” ²²On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that

lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

First Corinthians 12, and with it the New Testament as a whole, is emphatic that God is saving a diverse people: men and women, Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, Roman and barbarian, and the list goes on.

God is saving a diverse people, and he wants them united. And what's striking is that, from what we can see in the New Testament, God does not want his people to be content with this diversity taking the form of separate church communities, where everyone is the same in each church community, but the church communities that are different from each other, are still friendly with one another in superficial ways.

God was not satisfied with the Jewish Christians having their own Jewish churches, while the Gentile Christians had their own Gentile churches. He wanted Jews and Gentiles united in true fellowship and community under his gospels – to such an extent that even the Apostle Peter was confronted by the Apostle Paul when he started avoiding direct fellowship with Gentile believers in favor of Jewish believers more like himself. [Galatians 2:11-14]

In light of that truth, God cannot be pleased that, as Martin Luther King Jr. put it, “Eleven o'clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours, if not the most segregated hour, in Christian America.”

But it's not just about race. Yes, one implication of this is that God is not satisfied with us having white churches here and black churches there, and so on. But another implication is that God is not satisfied with us having a wealthy church here and a poorer church there. He's not satisfied having a white-collar church over here and a blue-collar church over there. He's not satisfied having a Republican church here and a Democratic church there. He's not satisfied having a church where no one seems to struggle with disability over here, and a church for disabled folks over there. And we could go on. Along each of those lines where people in the world tend to divide – along each of those lines where diversity in the world leads to separation and even self-segregation ... in those areas of diversity, God wants to see unity among his people. And not just at some abstract level, or a vaguely spiritual level, but in our actual communities and actual fellowship, and actual relationships.

Peter could not have gotten away with telling Paul, “Look, Paul, I'm spiritually united with the Gentiles ... but I'm not going to actually spend time with them or share meals with them.” To Paul that was a denial of the gospel. Because God desires his people to reflect both his unity and his diversity.

Now ... we can get lost in that. It's a lot of big ideas. So let's focus on something more immediate and concrete to start.

You know that person here in the church ... who just seems weird to you? Maybe they talk too much, and it drives you nuts. Or maybe they don't talk enough, and it drives you nuts. Maybe they're interested in things you find too odd. Maybe they're interested in things you find too mainstream. Maybe their cultural background feels uncomfortably different to you. Maybe the way their family functions kind of confounds you. Maybe their life seems too chaotic or maybe their life seems too organized. Maybe their personality is just so different from yours. And for all of those sorts of reasons ... you don't really like them.

Think now of that person ... and recognize a couple things.

First of all, that person who is so different from you ... who maybe annoys and irritates you – that person reflects the image of God in certain ways that you don't as well. And so, in a sense, you need them to more fully show forth the image of God.

If everyone was like you ... you might feel more comfortable in the world. But the Church would do a much, much poorer job of reflecting God's image. You bear God's image from one angle. And it's wonderful. But others bear God's image from other angles. And we need them too. We need them all. So first, recognize that that person you struggle with – they are essential to the Church's calling to bear God's image.

But second, along with that, recognize that God is likely calling you to a deeper relationship with that person you find odd.

The implication of all of this ... the implication of the Triune nature of God, of how God has written both unity and diversity into creation, and humanity, and his Church – the implication is that you might be exactly who God wants to reach out to that person, to form a relationship with them ... to be a friend to them. Because God delights in unity and diversity among his people. And when there are two people, both of whom God has made in his image, both of whom Christ has redeemed by his blood, both of whom God is at work in by his Holy Spirit – when there are two individuals among God's people, who are very different from each other ... who can then come together, in Christian love – as brothers or sisters in Christ – and love each other, and appreciate each other, and care for each other, and work to understand each other ... that unity in diversity, and that diversity that blooms within the unity of their relationship – that, in some mysterious way, points to something about the nature of our triune God. And it glorifies him.

So, who is that person for you? And don't be surprised if there's more than one. Maybe it's someone sitting across the sanctuary from you right now. Maybe it's a Christian you know in another setting. Maybe it's someone you're already friends with, but you struggle with. Maybe it's a family member – a sibling, or a parent, or a child, or an in-law, or even your spouse. Who is it that God has united you to in Christ, and maybe even in other aspects of life ... but they are very different from you? And how can you love them and relate to them in a way that shows forth the unity and diversity that's at the heart of our triune God?

Those kinds of questions may be a good starting point – a place to begin working towards this goal. But it shouldn't be where we stop. Because God has called his people to a unity in diversity and a diversity in unity that exhorts us to real relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ across

cultural divides and economic divides, across social divides and racial divides. Because when we, his diverse people, are deeply united, in real and tangible ways, rooted in our unity in Christ, that points to and glorifies our triune God.

That is certainly what the Apostle John describes as God's ultimate goal for his people in eternity. And God calls us to press on towards that goal even now.

Conclusion

God, who brings unity and diversity together in his very being – God has written unity and diversity throughout creation.

Brothers and sisters ... do you see it? Do you rightly recognize God as triune? And do you see the fingerprints of his unity and diversity in all that he's made?

And once you see it, do you respond to it rightly?

We are called to love, and appreciate, and protect, and preserve the unity and diversity of the created world that God has given to us.

That includes appreciating and honoring the unity and diversity that God has written into all of humanity.

But even more so, we are called to seek, and to work for, and to sacrifice our own comfort for the unity and diversity that God calls for in his Church – not just in the abstract, but right here, in our own congregation – recognizing that each person who's different from us unfolds some aspect of God's image that we may not show forth as well ... and when we are united with them in love, and purpose, and relationship, through Jesus Christ, then we, together, show forth God's image and glorify him even more.

And as we strive to show forth the image, we are also to look up and delight in the mystery, and the glory, of our triune God himself, who holds unity and diversity at the heart of his being. As the Creed reminds us, we are to "worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity."

Because that is who our God is.

And he is glorious.

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

Bavinck, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics. Volume Two: God and Creation*. Edited by John Bolt. Translated by John Vriend. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004.

Eglinton, James. *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2012.

Note: In my preaching I often cite and draw from a range of sources, which includes material from Christians within my theological tradition, Christians outside my theological tradition (in keeping with our church's core value of "Reformed Catholicity"), and also (following the Apostle Paul's example in Acts 17) non-Christians who are well outside of Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy. And so, when I cite an author or a source, that citation should not be understood or construed as me necessarily agreeing with, endorsing, or recommending to others anything else from that author or source, except for what I explicitly say I agree with, endorse, or recommend. When engaging with different materials and thinkers, all Christians must exercise wisdom and discernment to determine what is helpful, appropriate, and edifying for each person, taking into account their current needs, wisdom, and spiritual maturity.