

2 Corinthians 13:11-13  
Matthew 28:16-20

## THE GOD ON THE GO

The story is told about Cardinal Cushing of Boston, who was once called to the side of a man who had collapsed on the floor in a department store. Thinking that the man was dying, the Cardinal, who was a parish priest at the time, asked the man whether he believed in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The man opened one eye and said to those standing around, “Here I am dying, and he’s asking me riddles.”

On this Trinity Sunday, which follows right on the heels of Pentecost Sunday, wherein we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, we grapple with the mystery of the triune God. The other major holy days – such as Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost – focus on the mighty acts of God. However, Trinity Sunday is basically the celebration of a doctrine – namely, that the one God is revealed or made manifest (throughout biblical history and human experience) in three persons as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit or Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

To some extent, the doctrine of the Trinity is a riddle. We cannot easily fathom how God is one God and yet co-equally and co-eternally present in three modes of being. And, Holy Scripture isn’t much help because the word Trinity isn’t found at all in the Bible. The doctrine of the Trinity is assumed and implied because it is found in certain scripture lessons (such as the two that were read earlier) and due to our biblical ancestors’ experiences with the Lord God who is made known and acts in three ways.

There is the one God, who created and sustains the world, who is sovereign over all creation. The Lord called Abraham and Sarah into covenant, liberated the people Israel from their bondage in Egypt, gave the Law to Moses and the Israelites, brought them through the wilderness and into the Promised Land, and led them home again following their exile in Babylon. A Brief Statement of Faith makes this claim about God: “Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child, like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home, God is faithful still.” (lines 49-51)

But early Christians also believed that in the person of Jesus of Nazareth they encountered God in an altogether unique way. Early on, the disciples confessed that “Jesus is Lord” in the belief that Jesus Christ was also God. They experienced God in human flesh, who was one of us, one with us and for us. Jesus reveals God to us in the fullest light possible while also showing us what humanity looked like at its very best.

Also, on the day of Pentecost and beyond, God was present in the church’s daily experiences as the Holy Spirit. The Spirit also is God, who breathes new life into God’s people, equips us with every good and necessary gift, leads us deeper into the truth, empowers us to do God’s will and work, and goes with us every step of the way.

Despite the mystery surrounding the “three-in-One” God, what is very clear is God’s great love for us all and God’s desire to move closer and closer to us. A number of years ago, Bette Midler had a hit song entitled *From A Distance*. It had a catchy tune and some clever words but, when you get right down to it, it had some poor theology going for it! The doctrine of the Trinity helps us to affirm that, while God is transcendent or beyond us, at the same time, God does not relate to us from a distance. God moves closer and closer to us in order to be with us – always!

It's evident from scripture that the Holy One is the God on the go. The Lord our God is no stationary god. God is forever on the move. John Claypool said that this is what distinguishes biblical religion from other religions, which center on creating stability in the midst of chaos. They attempt to establish a condition of permanence in time and space. This is the very opposite of what Jurgen Moltmann calls the "exodus religion" of Abraham, which regards change and movement not as enemies to be resisted, but as ways God does God's work and calls human beings to fulfillment. Security with this kind of God never means sitting still or possessing something or remaining static; it means continually on the way to some goal beyond the present that beckons but is as yet unattained. The symbol of this kind of religion would be a hoisted sail, not an anchor; the goal is "a promised land" out ahead, not a haven of rest. (Glad Reunion, pg. 14)

Furthermore, because God is the God on the go, if we are to worship this God, if we are to faithfully follow this God, then we must be willing to move as well. God's people are sent. We are the children of God in motion. And thus, we read that God told both Abraham and Sarah, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" . . . "And Abraham and Sarah went out, not knowing where they were to go," but still they moved forward in faith. The risen Christ first appeared to the women at the empty tomb and said, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." The women did as they were told, and the men went and did likewise; and together they saw the risen Lord.

In today's gospel lesson, just prior to his ascension into heaven, Christ Jesus came to the eleven disciples and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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." At the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus seems to be saying to the disciples, "Front and center. The next act is yours. Your time has come!" Of course, the disciples are not left to their own devices. One way or another – whether as Father, Son, or Holy Spirit or all of the above – God will make good the divine promise: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

God is on the move and so too are the people of God in every age. What I find intriguing about these closing verses in Matthew's gospel is that Jesus speaks to and sends the eleven disciples (not the Twelve) and "when they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted." Even though the number of disciples was less than it had been, and even though, in the presence of their risen Lord, some doubted, nevertheless, God used them just as they were and sent them out to carry on Christ's ministry in the world. That gives me hope that despite our shortcomings and inadequacies, God still needs us and sends us to proclaim the Good News to all people. And remember, we do not go it alone. We journey forth with one another under the divine promise that "I am with you always!"

Someone has said that the fourth person of the Trinity is the believer. The Word of God becomes flesh in us. All God needs and wants are obedient people, disciples of Jesus, who are willing to "go" and give of themselves – who they are and what they have – and God will do the rest. You see, perfection is not a prerequisite for God to begin working with an individual or a church. God is willing to take us where we are and patiently move us toward where God wants us to be. Perfection rightly belongs at the end of the process of God's dealing with us, not at the beginning or even in the middle.

If we are willing to serve where the triune God on the go sends us, we can, we will, do some amazing things – with God's help! A pastor shared how his congregation struggled with

how to relate to their neighborhood. Over the years, most of the members of the congregation had moved to the suburbs, leaving their church in the middle of a decaying part of town. The fashionable apartment building next to the church was now a run-down, cheap hotel for drifters. After two major burglaries, the church was forced to buy an expensive alarm system. No longer was the door to the church office open to anyone who came in off the street. Weekday visitors had to press a button next to the front door, state their name and their business on the intercom, and await entry. The greatest concern was to make certain that after church meetings, all the doors were locked and the alarm system was activated.

One evening, as the church's usual monthly business meeting was winding down, Mary said, "On the way into the meeting tonight, coming in from the parking lot, I dropped my wallet. But I didn't know it until this young man came up to me and handed it to me before I entered the church. He was poorly dress and looked awfully thin. Of course, I thanked him profusely for returning my wallet. He asked me what sort of church we were, what denomination, and I told him. We had a short talk there on the steps and, he told me that he had taken up residence at that horrible hotel on the corner. He can't stay with him family anymore, he said, he is sick. I am fairly certain what his sickness is. The hotel is full of these unfortunate young men. And here we sit as a church with our doors locked tight. Is there anything we can do for them?" There was a great silence in the meeting room. Someone said, "Well, I don't really think there is much we can do for them." Someone else said, "They probably wouldn't feel very comfortable at our services." Mary said nothing else and the meeting ended.

But after the meeting, Sue said to Mary, "I was proud of you tonight. You really touched my heart. I think we ought to take this matter up with our Bible study group on Wednesday." They did. The women at the Wednesday Bible Study prayed and asked God to lead them in the path of service to the men in the hotel.

The pastor said that the women in that group began visiting in the hotel. A few weeks later, they moved their Wednesday Bible study into the dilapidated lobby of the hotel, bringing refreshments, inviting the residents to join them. That led to their "Lunch with the Lord," a regular Friday free lunch of soup and sandwiches at the church for the men. Now, each Sunday, at least a dozen of the men attend worship, often sitting with some of the older women who are members of the Bible study group. (Will Willimon)

Some said they felt a breeze blowing through their once, tired, old church. That breeze was none Other than the Holy Spirit on the move, equipping and sending those older women to those younger men - with nurturing compassion and delicious food!

We worship the God on the go, and there's no getting around the fact that God also moves us and sends us out into the world to continue Jesus' ministry to those in need. How have we experienced the triune God in our individual lives and within our communal life? How will we tell the Good News to others and make them disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit? What does God want us to do to fulfill our mission statement to "Share God's love, embrace our neighbor, and nurture each other?"

Let us continue to listen carefully and pray seriously to know God's will. Let us be open and willing for God to speak to us and point us in the direction we are to go. Then, let us go to work. Let us serve others with compassion. And, may our service bring glory, praise, and honor to the triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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