

“Connection with God”

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June 7, 2020

Text: John 16:12-15

When I was in college, I did a lot of work in Cabrini Greene. Those of you who have ties to Chicago will know that Cabrini used to be one of the most violent housing projects in the United States. I went grocery shopping for elderly people and taught kids in after-school programs. I would spend afternoons, playing basketball, jumping rope, and teaching Bible stories. I don't think the children learned much from me. They definitely didn't learn anything about shooting baskets or double Dutch. I would prepare my lessons from the suburban white kid curriculum. We would show pictures of white Jesus with little blonde children hanging out with him. The program mostly kept kids busy for a few hours after school.

I learned one of the most important things of my life there. We were an earnest group of college Christians. We were mostly Southern Baptist, and we would pray “Father, just” prayers.

“Father, just help these children to have a good day.”

“Father, just be with them.”

“Father, just help them.”

You get the idea.

Then, finally, a leader took us aside and explained, “Stop praying to Father.” He quoted some statistics that made me realize what a hugely patriarchal culture we were working in. He said, “If you're going to pray to anyone, then you need to pray to God, our Mother.”

I was working with a bunch of Southern Baptists and this was not the hotbed of feminism, so I was shocked to hear it. And yet, it opened up a whole new connection for me.

The doctrine of the Trinity works in much the same way. On one hand, the doctrine is rich and complex as we try to fully comprehend it. There are three people and one substance. We do not believe in three Gods, but one God—the Creator, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit. It's a puzzle, a koan.

On the other hand, the Trinity has a beautiful simplicity that allows us to connect and commune with God in the way that makes the most sense. The ease and accessibility of the Trinity allows us to understanding God in powerful ways.

For some people, looking at creation, and knowing that there is a God who delights in crafting the smallest flower that will wither in a day or the deep sea fish that will never be seen by a human eye, is enough to inspire them. The idea of God the Creator forming us in God's image gives meaning to one of the core questions in life: "Why do I exist?" The knowledge that we live because we have been created by the divine, that we are formed in God's image for a reason and a purpose brings meaning to each day.

Another person might be inspired by the wisdom of Jesus. We memorize the words, allowing his teachings to become a part of our daily rhythm. We appreciate the man of sorrows who knows how to weep and walk alongside us in our pain. To hear how God journeyed among us, partaking in a sacred meal, suffering the depths of human emotion, gives people a sense of unity with the divine. Having someone who has gone before us, who knows what we might be feeling, allows us a sense that someone understands.

And for others, to have a Spirit who will not leave us abandoned and neglected, but fills us with abundance and joy allows another path of communion with the divine. The Spirit moves in and among us, enlightening us, aiding our intellect, and helping us to fathom the mysteries surrounding us. The Spirit whispers understanding in our most confusing times and gives meaning to our deepest groaning. The Spirit of God gives birth to us, even as we give birth to God. We create alongside God. That powerful force of creation allowed us a glimpse of who God is, so much so that many Christians describe themselves as being born-again.

God is one substance, three persons, and many names. And for me, the beauty of that reality means that we will connect with God at different times, in different ways. We will sense God's presence near to us.

If there has been one thing that this pandemic has shown me, it is the meaning of connection. That has been the most pernicious thing about this pandemic: people have had to suffer in isolation, as sons cannot hold their father's hand as they die. Daughters are not able to hold their moms and return some of the love that their mom gave.

Even for us—Kibbie, Mary, Chris and I—we will all tell you that the hardest thing about this time has been the fact that we have not been able to *be* with people. To connect with them. We don't have last rights as Presbyterians, but we do sit by bedsides, pray, and read scriptures. We try to be with people in some meaningful way when they suffer. It is in this power of connection, we learn to sense God's presence in and among us in different ways. In different times in our lives. I think

that's why so many of us joined the protests for George Floyd this week. Two thousand people from New Canaan gathered because we yearn for connection with our human family. We needed to stand in solidarity George Floyd's family and with one another to say that we are all made in the image of God.

And now, may we live each day with anticipation of how God might reveal godself to us in new ways.

To the glory of God our Creator, God our Liberator, and God our Sustainer.
Amen.

