

The Choreography of Love

The Scripture – John 17

²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. ²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.

Review

Good morning . We are in week 3 of our 2013 Sermon Series entitled “That we may be one ... that the world may be won.” Over the past two weeks we have been looking at the tail end of Jesus’ prayer recorded in the 17th chapter of the Gospel according to John where Jesus is praying for the church. Praying that the church would become such a beacon of God’s love expressed by our unity that the world would be won to Jesus. We saw how that unity was to be expressed across the whole church and that the unity was to be of the same order as the love and unity that exists within the Trinity. But what does the love and unity look like in the Trinity. So last week I attempted to lay the foundation for addressing that question by unpacking a picture of the Trinity – looking at three questions: What is the Trinity ? One God in three unique eternally existing persons. / Is it Biblical? Absolutely – driven by the gradually revealed divinity of Jesus, we saw that the Trinity was not so much heard in the scriptures as overheard. We saw how the early church fathers wrestled with how to express the nature of God for 300 years until they came up with the great Trinitarian Creed at the Council of Nicaea. / Finally we looked at what difference having a Trinitarian God makes versus having a Unitarian God. Quoting C.S. Lewis, “It matters more than anything else in the world”. The Triune nature of God becomes the basis and model of all community, love, and unity. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have been in a dance of love for all eternity. This week we will look at how love is choreographed in the Trinity. Choreography is simply the planned steps of a dance. What are the steps to the dance of love that have been going on for all eternity.

Let’s pray

Exegesis of John 17:22-26

Turn with me in your bibles to John 17 verse 22. This week we don't have the scriptures on the screen and I would like you to open your bible on your phone or the pew Bible in front of you. We learn best when we hear and see and repeat. You repeat what you see and hear when you take notes. Our text today is again taken from the end of Jesus' high priestly prayer. Each week we have looked at a different part of this text. This week I want you to see the three times Jesus refers to the love that existed within the Trinity between the Father and the Son. In verse 23, Jesus prays that the world would know that the Father loves the church with the same kind of love that exists between the Father and the Son. In verse 24, He prays that all of His disciples would be with Him so that they could see the glory and honor that the Father bestowed on Jesus because of the Father's great love for the Son. Finally, in verse 26, Jesus prays that the same love that exists in the Trinity between the Father and the Son would be in the disciples.

That is an amazing trio of statements. All are centered around the love that exists within the Trinity. What I would like to do this week is see if we can unpack some of what this love within the Trinity looks like. If the Trinity is a dance, how is love choreographed within the Trinity? Can we get a little peek into the inner workings of the Trinity. This has very practical implications. Our text today tells us that Jesus wants the world to know this kind of love. He wants it inside His disciples. And He wants us to see it. However in this passage, Jesus doesn't explain what this love looks like. We'll have to look elsewhere to get a glimpse of this love. How does the Father love the Son. And how can that love be in us?

How the Father Loves the Son

We are going to look at six ways love is choreographed between the Father and the Son. I want these pictures / these glimpses of the love within the Trinity to wash over us and to soak in. Let's not hear these without applying them to our lives. Remember, Jesus is praying for us that the world would see this love. And He is praying that the love that exists in the Trinity would be inside of us.

Matthew 12:17-21 Trinitarian Love is choreographed through delighting in the beloved The first way we see love expressed within the Trinity is in the fact that the Father delights in the Son. Matthew tells us that when Jesus was healing people and keeping it under wraps that he fulfilled a prophecy of Isaiah (42:1-4) . In that prophecy, the Father calls the Son "my beloved" and Matthew gives us our first glimpse of what love looks like within the Trinity. It says that the Father delights in (NIV) / takes pleasure/ is well pleased in the Son. The word that Matthew uses is stronger than that because it literally means "found delight."

The Father seeks out and finds delight in the Son. It is intentional and active. God the Father seeks out things in the Son that delight Him. What would it look like if we followed the model of love in the Trinity and sought out things in others that delight us?

The key to learning to delight in someone / to take pleasure in them requires me to see and know their gifts and image of God that is imprinted on them. And that leads us to the next way that the Father loves the Son:

John 10:14-16 Trinitarian Love is choreographed through deep knowing - The Father deeply knows the Son Love is expressed when we take the time to deeply know one another. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. Jesus is giving us another glimpse of how love is expressed within the Trinity. They deeply know each other.

How can that happen with us? It starts by spending time together. But it takes more than just spending time. I remember leading a men's group on retreat with Kit McDermott a number of years ago. This men's group had been meeting regularly for about 2 or three years. They were involved in each others lives. But on the retreat, Kit asked them this question:

"Look at the person next to you. What are his hopes and dreams? What things is he really passionate about?" Not one man could answer the question about either the man on his left or his right. Spending time is a start – but if we are going to grow in our love for each other, we need to get to know each other – to know each other deeply as the Father knows the Son and the Son knows the Father.

Are we interested in taking the time to get to know one another deeply? To see them as God created them.

Last fall, I was spending a weekend with my family in Michigan. My sisters and my mom. Some cousins and an aunt. We don't share a lot in common in terms of our interests. And there was a point in the weekend when I found myself getting annoyed with certain things in their lives. And I felt God spoke to me. You really don't love them. You don't want to get to know them. To know how I made them. I delight in them. You will too if you can learn to know them as I do.

Do you feel that way at times with those around you? You don't want to invest in really getting to know those around you? But remember, Jesus is praying for us that the love that is in the Trinity would be in us.

And that leads us to the next aspect of the characteristic of the love we see in the Trinity:

John 5:20 Trinitarian Love is choreographed through transparent living - The Father loves the Son by living transparently

Let me start by defining what I mean by living transparently. Webster's defines transparency as:

to allow light to pass through so that objects behind can be distinctly seen.

And I would apply that to our lives by saying that if we live transparently, we live our lives in such a way that others can see the real me. Others can see everything I am doing – and not just what I am doing but why I am doing it. Another way to say it is that I am living a transparent life if others can see me as a really am.

That can be a scary thing but it is one of the essential practices of healthy community life. And we see this transparent living modeled for us in the Trinity. "For the **Father** loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing." There is a complete openness between the Father and Son. Jesus said one time that His life was so transparent, that if you see me, you can see right through me to actually see the Father. John 14:9 Whoever has seen me has **seen the Father**.

You might say of course the Father and the Son can live transparently – they are flawless. Again, remember Jesus wants our love to be like the love of the Trinity. Jesus' brother James got this. He calls us to live transparent lives when he tells us to confess our sins to one another (James 5:16) as a vehicle for healing. Where confession is a regular part of our life together there is a path for healing. Are we actively seeking God's healing through a community of believers by being transparent? I know that this is much easier said than done. I don't want you to know my sins. Because then I am afraid that you won't love me if you knew the real me. When I have been exposed for who I am I am ashamed and I go into hiding. Very frequently still I want to take my marbles and go home. There is no other bigger damper on Christian unity and community than when we go into hiding from each other because of our shame.

Every Wednesday night a group of us gathers in the hayloft from 7 – 8 PM and we pray for the church. By the way, all of you are welcome. We follow the ACTS model of taking time for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication. Every week when we come to the confession time, my mind races: Do I let my brothers and sisters know where I have really failed You today Father. How much will I disclose? But real authentic life together begins by following the model of living transparently that we see within the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But I don't think James is proposing just a liturgy of confession practiced only in church or in a confessional. He is talking about a life style of confession because we have learned to be transparent with each other. The Father shows the Son everything.

How transparent are you with those who are close to you. Do you show them everything? Let them see where you hurt? Do you let them see where you fail God? To learn to delight in one another we need to know one another deeply. To know one another deeply we need to learn to live with Trinitarian love and live open lives with each other.

John 6:27 Trinitarian Love is choreographed through endorsement John tells us that the Father put His seal of approval on Jesus.¹ How many remember the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. If a product had that it meant that this had been tested and approved by the folks at Good Housekeeping magazine. We give our neighbor our seal of approval when we endorse him or her to others. That is what the Father has done with the Son. We see this when the Father speaks about the Son to others. “This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.” “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.”² A seal of approval is also an endorsement of sorts. We see love modeled in the Trinity in the way the Father endorses the Son.

I don’t know how many of you are on the social network LinkedIn – but it is a social network for business. Kind of a Facebook for business. And they have a mechanism for endorsing another. Now my work is extremely narrow and technical. I am an embedded systems engineer. Hardly anybody knows what that is? Not even Barbara can explain what I do. But very often I get these emails.

So and So – a friend from church – a family member - endorses you as an embedded systems engineer.

This person doesn’t know what kind of embedded systems engineer I am. How can he endorse me?

The Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval wouldn’t mean anything if they didn’t know the product. The Trinity endorses one another out of their deep knowing of each other. Can we learn new and creative ways to endorse one another? To set our seal of approval on them and what they are doing. As I have reflected on this expression of love within the Trinity, I have been very convicted about how I don’t want to do that. There is a risk in putting my reputation up to endorse another person. What if I tell others how good someone else is and they let me down? Won’t that reflect on me? Yes. They probably will let you down. And it probably will reflect on you. But all love is a risk. Love is messy. If we don’t want to take a risk let’s give up right now. Think of the risks Jesus took by identifying with people like us. He regularly endorsed people by going to their homes and eating meals with them. And His reputation suffered.

¹ John 6:27 For on him God the **Father** has set his seal. (of approval NIV) *and* put His seal of endorsement

² Matthew 3:17; Matthew 17:5

I remember one time God told me in advance that a day was coming when I would have to look completely wrong and to be prepared. Well the day came, and I sure didn't feel prepared. Someone who I had endorsed / put my reputation behind completely let me down with another group of people. And although I was forewarned, it was extremely hard. Yes there is a risk. But looking back, I see how this was used for the healing of that other person. They saw that I endorsed them knowing that they might fail. And then when they failed, I still loved them. And after trust was restored, I endorsed them again. Learning to get behind and endorse someone else is one of the ways the Trinity expresses love.

Is God calling you to take a risk and get behind another. To put your reputation at risk by endorsing someone you know is imperfect and will very possibly fail you.

John 3:16 Trinitarian Love is choreographed by letting go of the beloved

We see the most amazing act of love in the entire universe when the Father sent the Son to us. There was perfect fellowship and unity within the Trinity before that happened. Sending Jesus to us meant a break in that perfect fellowship. A supreme letting go of all that was dear. Taking a risk by letting go of the intimacy that they had together. I believe that part of the reason the Holy Spirit records Jesus saying that he was sent more than 50 times in the Gospel, was that Jesus wants us to know what an extravagant act of love it was on the part of the Father to send the Son and to call us to the same kind of love.

I remember when our daughter Sara and her husband Jeff decided to go away for 2 years to serve as teachers in China. That was hard to let them go. True love doesn't hold things lightly. Think about what it was like for the Father to let go of the Son and send Him here. Not just knowing what Jesus was going to go through – but knowing that their level of intimacy would not be the same. Love does not clutch the beloved. Love sends. Love let's go. We see it in the Trinity. Jesus is praying for that kind of love for us.

Where are we wrongly holding on to something and not letting it go?

John 17 Trinitarian Love is choreographed through Giving : We see in Jesus prayer in John 17 that the Father is constantly giving to the Son. Jesus tells the Father seven times “you gave...” (disciples / authority / words / glory.)³ In fact, earlier in John's account of the Good News, Jesus says that the Father has given him all things.⁴

³ Disciples (vs 9 ; vs24) / authority (vs 2) / words (vs 8) / Glory (vs 22, vs 24) ; Other things (vs 7)

⁴ John 3:35 The **Father** loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Matthew 11:27 All things have been handed over to me by my **Father**

We see love modeled in the Trinity by exercising the power to give. John Rankin develops this idea in many of his writings and when he speaks. He says that the power to give sums up God's nature. It is the first and the foundational power that sum up all Biblical faith and shows us how to live Biblically.

Trinitarian love models for us a life of continuously exercising this power to give. Usually when you hear about the power of giving in the church you put your hand on your wallet. But that is not what I am talking about. When we exercise this power to give rather than the exercising what we think is our right to receive we break one of the major strongholds in our lives. Sin would have us constantly taking / constantly receiving. The Trinity models for us a life of constantly giving.

Probably one of the greatest examples of this in all of literature is in Victor Hugo's great novel, *Les Misérables*. In that story the main character Jean Valjean has been imprisoned for 19 years for stealing a morsel of bread for his sister's sick child. He gets out of prison and cannot find lodging anywhere because of his past. Finally a kindly bishop takes him in. Jean steals some of the bishop's silverware and is caught by the police. When the police bring Jean back to the bishop, the bishop exercises the power to give by telling the police that he had given the silver to Jean and that Jean forgot to take some candlesticks that were very special heirlooms from his aunt. After the bishop convinces the police to let Jean go, he even lets Jean keep the silver and the candlestick. This unbelievable act of giving grace sets off a chain of events in Jean's life that transform him and those around him. We see this one act of giving repeated over and over in Jean's life. This is the power to give in the extreme.

Can we learn from the Trinity the power to give as an expression of love? Love in the Trinity is choreographed by a letting go of the beloved to give to those outside the Trinity.

Conclusion

What areas (and I emphasize areas because there are probably more than one) in your life do you need to learn new steps to express your love so that it can look like the love choreographed within the Trinity. Jesus prayed that the love that exists within the Trinity would exist in us. We have looked at just a few examples from the Scripture where the Father choreographs steps of amazing love for the Son. The Father expressed delight in Son because He knew Him deeply and because they shared life transparently. The Father set His seal of approval on the Son. The Trinity models love by continuing to holding those we love lightly and exercising the power to give.

How can we be part of the answer to Jesus prayer by learning to express love in the ways it is expressed in the Trinity. This is not a laundry list of “shoulds.” Many of us here are driven by duty. “I need to do this because it’s my duty.” It’s hard to delight in someone when you are doing it out of duty. Each of these is an invitation to learn the dance steps of the Trinity. And remember, since Jesus is praying for this to happen, He will be the dance instructor to help us who have two left feet. To encourage us who are weary of well doing. We are not going to have to do this alone. He is with us in this.

Let’s take just a minute or so and let the Holy Spirit finish this sermon.

Let’s pray...