

# Half-Truth

Week #3 (Most Holy Trinity)

May 27<sup>th</sup> 2018

*Half-Truth Explored: The mystery of the Trinity, and the misconception that "all religions are the same."*

This is the third week of our series we have called half-truth.

They are things that are kind of true, but not completely.

Half-truths can lead us to the wrong destination if we are not careful. So we are taking this series to confront some popular half-truths.

Two weeks ago, we looked at this half-truth that said there are many ways to God.

We said that is true if you mean that there are many ways to experience God. We said it is true if you mean that many religions have insight into God, but that ultimately if Jesus is who he said he is,

if he is the Son of God, the Messiah,  
then he is the ONLY way to God.

As he described,  
he is the way, the truth and the life.  
This doesn't necessarily mean  
people who don't believe in Jesus are damned;  
it means that Jesus  
is our only way home to God  
and everyone who will be in heaven,  
will be there through the work of Jesus Christ.

Last week, we looked at the half-truth  
that you don't need go to Church  
or need any Church.

There is a growing belief  
that the Church is unnecessary  
to connect with God.

We looked at three reasons  
we need the Church.  
We need the Church as a place  
in which ***we can serve others  
and discover our spiritual gifts.***

We need the Church  
to be *encouraged and supported*  
*by other people's faith.*

We need the Church because  
*it is a visible sign of God's*  
*vision in the world*  
to draw all people and all nations to himself.

Today we want to confront this half-truth  
that all religions are the same,  
deep down.

Now, that is true if you mean  
that all religions struggle  
with and attempt to answer  
the same questions.  
They struggle with questions  
such as what is the very foundation of reality.

Does God exist?  
If God exists,  
what is his nature?  
Is there one God or many gods?  
If God exists, what does he expect of us?

Does he expect anything of us?

Why is there something and not nothing?  
What happens to us after we die?

These and many other questions  
are questions that various religions  
attempt to answer.

Religion is a set of beliefs  
that attempt to explain what life is all about,  
who we are,  
and the most important things  
human beings should spend their time doing.

But not all religions are the same and  
even a very cursory look  
at the different religions  
reveal that they are not the same,  
that they answer these questions  
in very different ways,  
which I will do in a minute.

But first let me explain  
why that half-truth can be a problem.

One, it doesn't allow us to engage in real dialogue with others who have different beliefs.

It creates a kind of in-authenticity. It is ok to disagree with others.

Relationships don't depend upon agreeing on everything but if we gloss over the differences than real conversation and dialogue won't take place.

And when there is a lack of authenticity distrust tends to set in.

Another problem with just saying all religions are the same is that it makes us think there are not real answers to those questions.

So we give up even pondering or even asking those questions and we give up even thinking about them and pondering them.

Better to argue and discuss politics  
or cooking or sports  
than to talk about and reflect on the most  
important subject of all.

So it is important for us  
to come to the full truth:  
all religions wrestle with the same questions,  
but not all religions  
come to the same answers  
to those conclusions.

In fact, religions often come to very different  
answers to those questions.

To point out the difference,  
let's start with one of the basic questions  
religions try to answer  
and we will come back  
to how our faith answers this question.

The most basic question  
religions ask are about God.  
Who is God?  
What is his nature?

Is there one God or many gods?

Let me just admit,  
I am over simplifying this a bit.  
It can get tricky in describing other religions,  
which goes to show  
that they do think differently.

Some religions would say  
you can't even know anything about God.

There is a God,  
but you really can't know anything about him.

Then there are other religions  
that say there is no God at all.

There is no supernatural  
only human ethics.

This would include Unitarianism,  
Confucianism, and secular humanism.

Since they don't believe there is a God,  
they don't pursue a relationship with God,

but simply try to figure how to live.

Some religions say there are **many gods**.  
This is **called pantheism**.  
**Hinduism, and Buddhism**  
would fall into this category.

Other religions say there is **one God**.  
**So Judaism and Islam**  
fall into this category.

But even, in saying that  
they have very different conceptions  
of what that means.  
Judaism says God can be known  
in a personal way  
and Islam says that is impossible.

Again, there are many more nuances  
to these than I am describing,  
but my point is this:  
on even the most basic question,  
**all religions are not the same.**

What I want to do for the rest of our time

is then explain the Christian answer to the question “who is God?” and one incredibly important implication of that question.

And I hope by the end you have a little more clarity on who God is and how the truth, the fact of the Trinity validates what you would already believe in your heart of hearts.

I hope it validates what you believe and ultimately what many others in our culture believe is the most important value in life. And on the other hand shows that the one thing that probably most frustrates you.

Christianity says there is one God and three divine persons.

At the very heart of reality,  
there is a community of three persons.

There is God,  
The Father who created you,  
God who died for you  
and God the Spirit who lives with in you.

All three persons are eternal  
and all three are God.

They each have distinct personalities.  
At the heart of all reality is the Trinity.

Today is Trinity Sunday  
and we celebrate this supreme mystery  
of our faith.

A mystery is a truth  
we cannot fully comprehend or understand.  
It is a truth we can know something about,  
but not everything.

Let me confess to you

this is the most complicated teaching  
of our faith,  
but that should not be surprising  
that to talk about God  
and who he is, is complicated.

If God is God,  
then it means we should find his reality  
both surprising and difficult  
to explain and impossible to fully comprehend.

The Trinity is like the family.  
Your family is one family  
but it has more than one member.

In a family a husband and a wife  
love each other.  
And then out of that love for each other,  
a child is produced.

There is one family,  
but three persons in the family.

God the Father loves God the Son  
and the Holy Spirit precedes

or is a result of that love,  
which has no beginning and no end.

Each person of the Trinity  
exalts each other and defers to the other.  
The Father, Son and the Spirit  
each center on the other  
and adore each other and serve each other.

And in glorifying and serving each other  
there is infinite joy.

Now here is the huge implication  
about the reality of the Trinity  
which validates the value  
you would probably say  
is the most important value  
and I think most people in our culture  
would agree is the most important value.

Since God is a community  
it means that the highest purpose is to love.

By love, we are to do what God  
has been doing from all eternity:

deferring to God and others,  
adoring God and respecting others,  
serving God and others.

Love is primarily a verb not a noun.  
God from all eternity is a community of love.

Each person in the Trinity  
loves and cares for the others  
- mutual self-giving love.

If God were not a Trinity,  
then love would not be the highest value  
because it would not be the nature of God.

For God to love,  
he must have an object to love.  
If God exists  
but is only one person and not three,  
there was a time when God  
was not love  
because God didn't have anyone to love.

Love can exist only in a relationship.  
You can love your mom

because your mom exists.

If you are a parent, you can love your kids because they exist.

You can't love someone

- you can't be for someone
- who doesn't exist.

If an un-personal God had created the world and its inhabitants, such a God would not in his essence be love - power and greatness possibly, but not love.

God though is Trinity.

God in his essence is a community of mutually self-giving love.

And because God is love it is why self-centeredness in others drives you crazy.

It is why you know your own self-centeredness can never fulfill you or bring you true satisfaction.

At the very nature of reality  
is love and a loving community.

And when we focus only on ourselves  
and our wants and what we want,  
we are fighting against  
the very nature of reality  
and how the world works.

We are fighting against God himself  
when we are self-centered.

God is a Trinity  
and in each person  
we see the result and overflowing of that love.

God is a Father who is Creator.  
God did not need to create the world  
because he was lonely  
or because he wanted someone  
to worship him or needed someone  
to worship him out of joy.

God didn't have any need.

God didn't create the world to get joy but to give it.

It is out of God's goodness and graciousness that the world exists and that we exist.

God created the world out of love, but then something went wrong.

God gave us free will of whether to love him back with one simple commandment.

The first human beings chose to be self-centered rather than loving God and we have been making the same choice ever since.

As a result of that self-centeredness, relationships have been broken as everyone tends towards selfishness.

The result of that selfishness is chaos.

And God could have just left us all on our own.  
Instead, out of love,  
his Son came into the world  
to show us what it means  
to truly love God and love others  
and so he laid down his life  
by going to the cross.

Then Jesus ascended into heaven,  
but he didn't leave us all alone.  
God sent His Spirit into the world  
to guide us and lead us  
through the trials and tribulations of life,  
to help us cut through the confusion of life.  
The Spirit dwells within our hearts and souls.

This is our faith.  
It is beautiful, isn't it?  
It presents an image of reality  
that we want to be true.

We want love to be at the very foundation  
of reality.  
And the Good News  
is that it is.

God is an eternal exchange of love:  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
He is a community of love.  
And is destiny for each of us  
is to share in that exchange of love,  
to be drawn into that community of love,  
to swim in that ocean of love and self-giving.

That is his will and his destiny for us.

To really enter into this reality,  
we must live it.

So here is my question this week:  
what do you need to do  
to stop being self-centered  
and love God and love others?

My guess is that in simply asking that question,  
you know what it is.

What do you do to make life about you?  
For tomorrow, just tomorrow  
would you put that self-centered thing aside?

Maybe for you it is that you have to have the remote.

Maybe you have to have a certain thing for dinner.

Maybe you want to go home and check out when your spouse really needs to talk to you.

Students, maybe you can help clean up after dinner tomorrow rather than run to your room.

Husbands, maybe you could help clean up after dinner tomorrow rather than run to your room.

I don't know what it is,  
but for just tomorrow,  
let's work on our self-centeredness  
and be other centered  
so we can enter into the love of the Trinity.