

00:17

Welcome to the New Life Podcast and Ministry of New Life Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Today we have this week's preached by Tim LaCroix, our senior pastor. Join us for worship each week at 10 o'clock at 950 Danby Road, Ithaca, New York. You can also visit us on our website, www.newlifeithaca.org. Now here's this week's sermon.

00:43

Here now a reading from Genesis chapter 1 verses 1 through 5. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was without form and void. And darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light. And there was light. And God saw that the light was good.

01:12

And God separated the light from the darkness, and God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening, and there was morning the first day.

01:27

We are living in the most connected period of human history. We are connected in so many ways to each other and to information. At our fingertips, we can call up any of the information within seconds that used to be located in the encyclopedia. Some of us know the World Book Encyclopedia. Lots of families used to have these things. There were 30 volumes big and contained all that you needed to know. They don't sell those anymore because

01:57

You can go on Wikipedia and look at it on your phone. All this information is there for us. We have all these connections, not only to information, but to other people through texting and through email and especially through social networks. We are very connected. We're constantly connected. I mean, I'm not wearing it today, but I have a smartwatch that's literally connected to me that buzzes and beeps me every time someone's trying to get in contact with me.

02:23

So we're very connected, but the irony of our connection, being the most connected people in the history of the world, the irony is we also have an epidemic of loneliness and anxiety. There have been many studies that have talked about this. We've talked about it here before. I don't think it's a proposition I need to prove. This is a very lonely time, and people are struggling with loneliness and lack of human connection.

02:50

This has been described for about 25 years. There was a book that came out called *Bowling Alone*. was published in the year 2000, speaking about the loss of human institutions where people used to gather and have connection and community are slowly falling away. And so the title *Bowling Alone* is that people used to bowl in leagues and have community and now they just bowl alone.

03:17

This is also reflected in the cinematic medium with a film called *Fight Club*, maybe some of you have seen. *Fight Club* explores this from a different angle. It follows the life of this person, business person, you know, played by Ed Norton. And he works and he lives alone, he has a nice apartment, but he has a severe lack of human connection. In order to get human connection, he orders furniture out of a catalog.

03:47

Talking to the salesperson on the phone is the way he gets human connection when he feels lonely. He also gets a human connection by attending support groups. Alcoholics, anonymous, cancer survivor support groups, even though he's not an alcoholic and he's never had cancer. He simply pretends to be these things so that he can have human connection. His need for human connection is so severe, he actually has a mental breakdown and creates an alter ego.

04:15

This alter ego is played by Brad Pitt. Brad Pitt is equally as volatile as he is charismatic in this movie. One of the main things this alter ego does, this sort of split personality, is he creates an organization called Fight Club where men get together and literally punch each other in the face so they can feel something and so they can feel human connection. And a lot of people...

04:41

I didn't really understand this when I was in seminary, but a lot of my seminary classmates thought that this movie was the most profound thing that had ever been produced. And I didn't really get it then, but I'm starting to get it. I'm starting to get it more. Maybe it was prophetic in a sense. You know, we are disconnected and in need of connection, and there's all sorts of ways that we can get connection. But one of the key things that we see is that human connection is really

05:11

good for us. And everybody knows this. We've talked about some of the studies before. Studies that find that the connecting with others is really good for your health. In fact, there's been plenty of work done on the fact that church is good for us. We know that church is good for us, the church attendance is good for your health, singing is good for your mental health, etc. etc. So we know human connection was good for us. So my main question is really why? Why is this the case? And then the second is

05:40

How do we solve this problem? How do we solve this problem? So the first question is the why. Why do we need this? Why do we need human connection? Well there's evolutionary explanations for it. I am a pastor and a theologian and I am here to teach you what God's Word says about it. What do we find in our writings that explains this need for everyone, this universal need for human connection? We find it here in the beginning.

06:10

We're going to start in Genesis chapter 1. read this passage to you at the beginning of the service. Genesis chapter 1 describes the creation of the world. And in the creation we find,

and this is my first point, that creation is triune. Creation is triune. That God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And this creation is made by a triune God. Now, just so you have a little bit of...

06:38

of why I'm talking about this. God Himself is described in the Bible and has been taught by the church for 2,000 years ever since the church has been in existence that God is a trinity of persons. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three persons, one God of the same substance, equal in power and glory. You can look on the front of your bulletin for a handy diagram which kind of goes into this in diagram form.

07:08

But, this is what we've taught. what we believe is that God is a community in essence. That God, in God's essence, is an eternal community, a fellowship of perfect love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And we're also told at the end of Genesis chapter 1 that we are made in God's image. So, God is communal, and He made us to be communal. In fact, some theologians

07:38

believe that the image of God is our need for connection, is our need for relationship. That really is the essence of the image of God in us, that we need connection and relationship with other people. And so the reason why we have this need is because I assert God made us that way. God made us that way. So how do we solve the issue that is before us? And what is the point really of the Trinity? Well,

08:06

Let's go to Genesis chapter 1. The first point is that creation itself is triune. We have a triune creation. What we read in the opening verses of scripture is a description of how God created the universe. And that description is a poetic form, but it describes theologically how things were created. And what we see in this opening words of scripture,

08:36

along with other parts of scripture, as that the creation is triune. That the Trinity is revealed. And it is the work of the whole Trinity to create. So, going back there, if you have a Bible you can look at Genesis 1 or can flip to the beginning of the bulletin where this passage is printed. After the first song. This is what it says, in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. So this is what we teach

09:05

is the basis of the doctrine of creation ex nihilo which is Latin for from nothing. We believe that God created everything from nothing and this is what is said actually in John chapter 1 where it says in the beginning was the Word and all things were made through Him and all things were made through Him and without Him was not anything made that was made. Nothing was made that wasn't made.

09:32

by God and there was no starting material, it was made from nothing. This is what the Bible asserts, that God created everything from nothing. And what we know about the beginnings, of course, there different theories about the cosmological origin or source of the universe, but most people would adhere to some version of the Big Bang Theory. What we know and what we believe that we see as we look at this physical universe is that the universe came from a singularity.

10:02

And that fits what we read here, that God made everything from nothing. Okay? In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now, we read in verse 2, the earth was without form and void. So it describes a creation that has some immaturities. I won't call them problems because God didn't make anything that wasn't good. He goes on to say that it's good. But we have some immaturities. The creation needs to mature and be brought to form. So that...

10:31

there's three problems or three immaturities, there I did it, I called it a problem. Three immaturities that it is without form, it doesn't have shape, it is empty and it is dark. Those are the three things that God is going to first work into his creation. So it is formless, needs to be shaped, it is empty, it needs to be filled, and it is dark. And it says that darkness was over the face of the deep and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

11:01

This is very important symbol in the scriptures and it also shows us the picture of the Trinity. There's God creating, the Spirit hovering, the language of a bird hovering, and this will come up later in the story of Jesus' baptism. We'll talk about that in a few minutes. So we have God creating, Spirit hovering, and then in verse 3, and God said the Word of God. The Word of God, the Spirit of God, the Father God, all three present.

11:31

at the creation. When we go to John chapter 1, John expands on this and shows us that this word is in fact the Son of God. This is what it says in John chapter 1, in the beginning was the Word. That's what it says in Genesis. The Word spoke and spoke things into existence. In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All things were made through Him and without Him

11:59

was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." So John is stating that this word is the Son of God. So we have Father, Son, and Holy Spirit present in creation. And the rest of scripture bears this out.

12:21

We have passages talking about how the Spirit creates. We read one last week at Pentecost, Psalm 104, talks about the Spirit creating. We have passages about the Son creating. We just saw that in John 1. We see in the book of Hebrews that He upholds the universe with the word of His power. We of course have verses about the Father of God

creating. So the Bible speaks of this, the Trinity, the creation itself is triune. The creation itself bears the mark of the triune God.

12:49

And I think that it's important to note that there's several features of this that I think come to bear in the creation. And one of those is diversity. know, God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, they are equal, but they are different. And that's really kind of the point. They're equal, but they're different. And...

13:14

And so the diversity that we see in this universe, think, reflects the diversity in the Godhead. Why is it that we have all sorts of different kinds of birds and plants and animals, all sorts of different kinds of stars? Sure, we have scientific explanations for those that I do not deny, but theologically, why is it the case? Theologically, it is the case because diversity, this beautiful diversity, is how God is. That reflects God's beauty. It reflects his...

13:43

threeness and the harmony of all things together. We know that the physical universe has a lot of harmony in how it works together. The harmony of the universe reflects God's unity and oneness. And so the creation itself reflects the fact that God is triune. But even more than that, if we keep reading in Genesis chapter 1, we find that we reflect the Trinity in this way. At the end of Genesis chapter 1 it says,

14:12

Let us make man in our own image and it says notice it's us, it's plural, right? Us. Let us make man in our own image and after our likeness and let them have dominion over the sea and over the verse of heaven and over the livestock and all the creeps that creep on the earth. And so he created mankind in his own image in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. We were made in God's image. We were made

14:42

with this need for community imprinted in us. And we see that bear out in Genesis chapter 2. Genesis chapter 2 is a story of the creation of Eve, of woman. And there's a few things to note here. I'm not the first person to say this. But the things that we note about the story of Genesis chapter 2 is one,

15:06

Man was not created to be, it's not good for us to be alone. We were created for relationship. And how is this problem solved? It is solved, first of all, by creating an equal. As I said, I'm not the first to observe this, but Eve was taken from a rib from his side, not from, apart from his head, or not apart from his feet, but from his side. And folks have recognized that this means that she is created an equal.

15:34

This is a very important... but also Eve is other. She's not like Adam. She's different. And so, this love and relationship is oriented toward the other, something that is different and also something that is equal. This is also true of the Godhead. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are different and yet they're equal. If they are not equal, then one of them is God and one of them is not. It's essential, in other words, for God to be equal in power and glory.

16:04

And the nature of God is revealed to us is that the persons are different. So we see that reflected in our creation, in the way we were made. That we were made to be in relationship with another, in the most intimate relationships with someone who is different. Male and female, he created them. He created Eve equal and different. Now, this is pretty important. One of the first things I want to say, this is important because

16:34

There's a pernicious teaching in the church that is called the eternal subordination of the Son. You may not have ever heard of this. It's called ESS for short. And what it says is that the Son was eternally subordinate to the Father. In other words, in the essence of the Son, He is subordinate to the Father. This is not what the church is taught. The church is taught...

17:00

something called economic subordination, which is that in their essence, the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit are equal in power and glory, but that for the plan of salvation, the Son submitted himself to the Father and to the will of God in order to achieve salvation. But in his essence, the Son is not subordinate. Why is this important? Why does this matter? Is this geeks arguing? It's important because it is used by those who which

17:30

to promulgate a patriarchal view of the world that women are created inferior to men. So that's why here's a way that this doctrine

17:45

is important for our lives and it's important for us to know about it because I don't want you to hear this teaching and know that this is actually orthodox teaching. It is not orthodox teaching. that the Bible teaches that men and women were created equal and in our relationship we have roles. And the same is for the Trinity, that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal in power and in glory. So we have this need for relationship because

18:15

God is that way and He created us that way. What are the applications of this? Well, the first application is that we are to worship this God. We are to worship this God. This Triune God, a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we worship. As I said before, know scientifically that going to church is good for you, that being in community is good for you. Studies have found that singing is good for your mental health.

18:44

We know these things. But what I'm asserting is our problem of loneliness is not a practical problem. It's a doxological problem. In other words, we're not going to solve this problem ultimately through, you know, going to church and being a part of the faith because it's good for us. We solve ultimately the problem of the fallenness of the world because we are

to worship this God. The solution is that we worship the triune God that created us. We acknowledge

19:14

this triune God to be God and we worship this God. This is the theological solution to our great need is that we have a need for God and that need for God is found in our worship of this God. And so we are called to worship. We are called to bow before this God. We are called to fall before this God as it is described in Isaiah chapter 6 that we read that when Isaiah saw the throne he was undone.

19:43

When he saw the throne, he heard the words that were being spoken and are eternally being spoken before the throne. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts. The whole world is full of His glory. This inspires us to worship. And so we are to worship this God. This God that created the world, this triune God that made us the way we are. We worship this God. But the second thing,

20:12

I would like to just point out is the way we were made. Medieval theologians have really were obsessing about the Trinity, I think in a good way. They were really reflecting on why God is triune and what's the implications of that. And one particular theologian that I've read named Bonaventure

20:34

He reflected on the Trinity as a necessity. He said that it was necessary that God be triune. The reason is because if God is one, a monad, then there's nothing to love. In fact, it would even ask the question, why would a singular monad create anything? It's just a singularity. There's no eternal relationship with anything, just one's self. And so the...

21:03

Love itself, perfected, has to be shared. And so, the love and diversity that exists in the universe necessitates a God that at least has an equal partner to share with. But then, he took it a step further. Perfect love is not just a love that is given and received, but a love that is shared with a third. And so the Spirit comes into the...

21:31

The Spirit isn't necessary because all three parties, all three persons of the Trinity, and I have to watch all that talk so I commit heresy, I'm reminding my words here. All three persons of the Trinity are giving and receiving love and sharing it with the third eternally. This has been called the eternal dance of perichoresis. This eternal dance of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, giving and receiving love, sharing it with the third in this sort of...

22:01

diagram of the dance of God and eternal love and fellowship as triune. And so, as we apply this to our relationships and especially to the most intimate relationship, perfect love is not only given and received but it is shared with a third. This is why I think that the Bible makes clear that the image of God is male and female. He created them.

22:30

The image of God is fully in male and female together and also his first command is to fill the earth, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. And so the most intimate relationship that God created was a marriage between a man and a woman with children. And so my practical application is that this is God's created design for

23:00

not only the family, but for intimate relationships. Intimacy is designed to be between a man and a woman in marriage and for the purpose of procreation. That's the way God made it. And that's really the only way, at least as I have wrestled with these, you know, wrestled with this idea of why certain things are called sin, why certain things are said to be sins against God.

23:27

in the realm of sexual ethics and the best reason that I can come up with that the church has also wrestled with, I didn't come up with it, is that this is the reason. Because we were created to be in this relationship, male and female, and the relationship was created for procreation. Now, don't hear me say what I'm not saying.

23:51

I'm not saying that if a couple is married and doesn't have kids, they're somehow sinning or not following what God said. There are all sorts of reasons why a married couple might not have children. They might be medical. There may be other reasons that are legitimate. And so I'm not saying that those relationships are disordered or wrong. What I am saying is the way that God created intimacy for marriage is

24:17

between a man and a woman oriented toward procreation. That's the way he made it. And I think that's why the church has taught that deviation from that is wrong, is sinful. So, that said, I think, I wanted to point that out because I think it is an implication of the way God made us, not because I enjoy talking about these things. So, moving to the second point. God's creation is triune.

24:47

We are implanted with the triune image of God, which is oriented toward community. The second point is this, our salvation is triune. Our salvation is triune. And we see this, first of all, at the baptism of Jesus. At the baptism of Jesus, we have this picture of recreation, of new creation. We see Jesus being baptized in the water. Genesis chapter 1 talks about waters.

25:16

We see the dove, the Holy Spirit hovering in the form of a dove. We find that in Genesis chapter 1 as well. And then we have the Father speaking, this is my beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased. The incarnation was God's plan to save us. Now, why do we need saving? Why do we need redeeming? Well, that's because the reason why we struggle to have

relationship and the reason why we struggle to find intimate connection with others is because

25:46

This world is not as it was created. One of the things we read in Genesis, the very next chapter, Genesis chapter 3, tells the story of the fall of humanity. And the reason why humanity fell was because we rebelled against God. It tells the story of it there. The implications of that rebellion are vast and universal. It's not only that human souls fell, but the entire creation fell in a sense.

26:14

Paul talks about in Romans that the entire creation groans awaiting the salvation of the saints of God. In other words, the creation itself, the ground is set in Genesis chapter 3 is cursed because of the sin of humanity. And also our relationships are fallen. So there's all sorts of relational aspects in Genesis chapter 3. It says there'll be enmity between the woman and the serpent. So there's

26:43

There's this enmity between human beings and creation. Creation is dangerous. You that wasn't the way it was made. This is result of the fall. It's this enmity between human beings and creation. And also says that there is struggle in marriage. It says, desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you. So our marital relationships bear the mark of the fall. All our relationships bear the mark of the fall. And then it says to the woman that in pain you will bring forth children.

27:12

Now doesn't just refer to labor pains and menstrual cramps. What it means is that raising children is painful. It is hard. All of our relationships are affected by the fall. Right? They're all affected. They're all fallen in a sense. They're all twisted and we struggle to communicate. Those of you who in any kind of relationship know that sometimes it's hard to communicate and people misunderstand each other and offend each other.

27:39

unintentionally, sometimes intentionally, that's also a result of the fall. So the point is that we have a problem that needs fixing. And this problem is not ultimately fixed through practical means. It can only be fixed through soteriological means. It can only be fixed through salvation. We need to be saved. Not only from our problem of relationships, but also from our rebellion against God. We need to be saved. That's clear in Genesis 3.

28:08

Adam and Eve immediately after they rebelled against God are aware of their nakedness and they are filled with shame. Shame is not a part of the creation, it's result of the fall. And so they hid from God and God sought them out. But they understood they were sinful and this was a problem. When Isaiah comes in contact with God as we already saw, he is aware of his sin and he understands it needs cleansing. Now we don't have in this modern culture a real sense of I need...

28:38

cleansing from my sin. That's not something that we really wrestle with. But I think we do wrestle with the fallenness of this world. We do understand that there's things that are not the way they're supposed to be. We understand that relationships aren't the way they're supposed to be. We understand the created world is not the way it's supposed to be. And so we long for its redemption. We long for its restoration. And what we find in Scripture is that the first step along this way is that we need to be safe.

29:07

And how are we saved? What will save us? The triune God will save us. In John chapter 1, this continues. It talks about the Word. In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. The Word was God. All things were made through Him. And without Him was not anything made that was made. And then it continues in verse 14. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

29:36

God Himself, the Son of God, was born of a virgin by the Holy Spirit and became one of us. He moved into the neighborhood in order to save us. He became one of us so that He might bear our same infirmities, that He might understand our temptations and our struggles and our weaknesses, and so that He may give His perfect life on the cross to redeem us, to redeem not only our souls,

30:05

to us of our sin by His shed blood, but also to redeem our relationships, to help us find true intimacy, beginning with God and spreading out throughout all of our web of relationships. This is His salvation, and this salvation is triune. As we've already sung in this service, the Father adopts us, the Son is incarnate and gives His life for us, and the Spirit draws us into this relationship.

30:33

The Spirit enlivens us, connects us to God. We find this even in our worship service, where the Spirit is what connects us not only between the vast distance, if you can call it a distance, between us and Heaven, that we are in the throne room of God. In a few minutes we will sing, Holy, Holy, Holy. We've already said it a couple times, because it's Trinity Sunday. We do this because we believe the Spirit connects us to God and His very presence. When we have the Lord's Supper,

31:02

We are able to feed on the Son of God and His flesh and blood because of the power of the Spirit. All aspects of our salvation, our worship, the sacraments, the Word of God coming forth are triune. This salvation is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We need to be saved. And the Savior of all is the triune God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, our salvation is triune.

31:32

Jesus' baptism, we have the new creation, the triune God revealed. All throughout the New Testament we have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit working to redeem His people. In Ephesians chapter 4, we find the Father, Son, and the Spirit building up the Church, the

Son giving gifts to His people. Every aspect of our salvation is triune. The answer to the issues that we have in our life, in our relationships, is the salvation of a triune God.

32:01

We need a savior and that salvation offered to us is triune. There, another movie. Okay, we're doing movies today. Gran Torino, I don't know if you've seen it. Why, the question I'm exploring here is, is how are we saved? How are we saved? Gran Torino follows this story of Detroit.

32:28

Detroit, you know, experienced what a lot of American cities experience, people moving out of neighborhoods, going to the suburbs and other places. And like a lot of American cities, you know, St. Louis, we lived in St. Louis for a number of years, lot of people, immigrants from other countries are placed in these areas, which are underpopulated. So one of the peoples that moved to Detroit were some oppressed and persecuted people called the Khmong from Southeast Asia. And they started living in this area.

32:58

Like a lot of places, you have these old fogies who don't want to leave. They're stuck there. So the story of Gran Torino is about a car, but the car is a part of the bigger story, which is this old guy who's a war veteran and he's racist. He's going to stay in this neighborhood by God and he's not going to leave. But the story of the movie is how relationship draws him in to his neighbors, especially to the son and the daughter. And he begins to love them. And actually his

33:28

his racist attitude towards them dissipates. He starts to care for them, especially when one of them is attacked. And he also wants to help them. And the ultimate thing that he does for them is that he helps the young man who is being drawn into gang activity. The story that the movie tells is that the son is being pulled into a gang, and if he doesn't join the gang, he's either going to be beat up.

33:55

his family is going to be attacked, ultimately he may be killed if he doesn't join this game. The old man sees this and he's like, this can't happen. If he draws in this game, their lives are going to be ruined and destroyed. So what does he do? He gives his life. He gives his life. I'm totally ruining this movie. You're going to know the ending. But it's too bad for you because it's been out for several years. He devises this plan.

34:24

He draws in the gang leaders, insults them, you know, he gets them to come to his house. He already called the cops beforehand, so the police are on their way. He insults them. He stands in between the gang and this Hmong family that they're trying to get this son to be a part of their gang. And he insults them. calls out to them and basically incites them to murder him right there in front of them. And the police come. They're caught red-handed. They're arrested. They're thrown in jail. And the boy is saved.

34:54

the boys say from the life that he was going to have. This is an imperfect, but I still think poignant illustration for what the triune God has done for us. It's not that he stayed in the neighborhood and we moved in, but he moved into our neighborhood, he demonstrates love for us, and he gives his life to save us. Without his life being given for us, we would still be lost in our sins, we would still be condemned to eternal punishment.

35:24

God saved us. This salvation is triune. It comes from Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And this is the God that we are called to worship, to worship with our whole hearts and our own minds. Let's pray. Thank you for listening to this week's podcast. Please rate and review us on your podcast service and share with anyone who may be interested.

35:47

The intro and outro music for the New Life podcast is provided by Sandra McCracken with her permission. Please visit her website at sandramcracken.com. We'll see you next week.

