

**“Brought In”**  
a sermon  
by Dan Griswold  
Trinity Reformed Church  
May 30, 2010

John 16:12–15

Romans 5:1–5

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Who are you?

That question, I suspect, is one we ask and are asked, maybe not out loud, maybe not in so many words, but a question that is nevertheless present in our minds as we deal with the many people we encounter. Who are you? What is your identity? How am I to understand you?

It is a question that seeks comprehension and comfort, that desires knowledge to smooth the way between people who must get along and work together. Who are you? What defines you? What must I know to be by your side?

It is also a question that aims for what is below the surface, that seeks to uncover the really real rather than the apparent. Who are you? What is the truth behind the facade? What must I know to trust you?

The answers we typically give are easy to recount. We say what we do. We say where we live. We name the names of our relatives, our friends, our neighbors, our colleagues. If the interest behind the question is clearly sufficient, we list hobbies and avocations that drive us and fill our moments of leisure. All these things help paint the picture that becomes, not a definition, but a usually sufficient answer to the question, “Who are you?”

What’s striking in all those answers is that they show how much we are known in and defined by our relationships.

Who am I? A son, a father, a husband, a pastor, a nerd, a musician.

Who are you? A daughter, a wife, a friend, one who loves to entertain, a sports fan.

Who are you? A recent retiree who now has more time for hobbies and volunteer work.

Who are you? All these, or some others, and much more: the many intersecting relationships of your life. To know you is to know that you exist in and are defined by these relationships.

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For many of us in this room, there is one relationship I have not yet named which is the most important.

Who are you? A child of God.

Who are you? A servant of Christ.

Who are you? A follower of Jesus.

Who are you? A forgiven sinner set on a path of transformation by the Holy Spirit.

Many of us can confess that this relationship most truly defines us, our relationship to our Lord. We know that failing to mention it gives a woefully incomplete answer to that question of identity. It's the truest, deepest, most life-giving answer that many of us here could share to the question, "Who are you?" — an answer that points to this relationship. We may be lots of things, but for the Christian the most important definition is not *who* we are but *whose* we are. Who am I? I am one who belongs to God.

But that raises another question, one higher and deeper, far more profound and more mysterious than the question about our own identity. It is the question of *God's* identity: "Who is God?"

And what I believe is true of us is also true of God. God is not known apart from relationship, but rather God is known by those relationships. God is not unrelated, or "relationless." God is relational, and is known truly in and by those relationships.

Yet there is a complication here. For we are not God, and God cannot be defined as we are. We are defined and determined to some extent by our relationships to each other, and we are defined and determined absolutely by our relationship to God. But this doesn't work the other way around. God is not defined and determined by the relationship God has with us.

So, we come to that question, "Who is God?" And we cannot answer it by saying that God is *my* God, God is *our* God, and expect that to be sufficient. Surely, we must recognize the arrogance in thinking that God is *defined* by the relationship God has with any of us.

But there is surely something true to this whole matter of relationship with the question of who God is. God *is* defined by and known in relationship. But that relationship by which God is known is not any relationship with us. It is, rather, a relationship about which our Gospel lesson for today speaks.

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There, Jesus is giving final instructions to his disciples. He has much to tell them, more than either time or their capacity for his instruction permit. But he is confident that these limitations will not have the final word. The disciples will be given all they need, they will be instructed sufficiently in his teaching, even after he departs, even when he is no longer with them.

In short, they need not worry. Because the Spirit of Truth will continue what Jesus has been doing. All they need, all they require, their continuing preparation to live and act as disciples of Jesus Christ will be given to them by the Holy Spirit.

And the instruction will continue, Jesus tells them, because the Spirit will tell them what they need to know. The Spirit will honor Jesus in this way. The Spirit will glorify Jesus, by declaring the things they need to know for the days that are coming. They can count on this. They can rely on this. They can, because the Spirit will speak what Jesus has and what he knows. And these, truly, belong also to the Father. The Father has what Jesus has, knows what Jesus knows, and the Spirit — yes, the Spirit — speaks what belongs to the Father and to Jesus, the Son.

Now that's a relationship! And not just any relationship. This is a relationship of love and unity far above any other. And like all relationships, but superior to all as well, this relationship defines those who participate in it. These three — the Father, the Son, the

Spirit — are defined by their relationship to each other. It is who they are, it is *how* they are. They *are* this intimate connection, this unity of love and will, with each other. You can't consider one apart from the other. You can't say that here or there one of them is at work completely independently of the others. They are together,

in agreement,  
in activity,  
in knowledge,  
in love,  
in blessing,  
in purity,  
in holiness.

They are in relationship to each other, as only God can be . . . with God.

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So in these words of comfort by Jesus to his disciples, Jesus gives them a glimpse of the character of God. And that character is one of supreme relationship. God *is* relationship, *this* relationship of love, this relationship of unity and mutual participation of Father, Son, and Spirit.

This is tremendously important. For people have all sorts of pictures of what God is like:

A kindly old grandfather;  
a cold tyrant;  
a sorrowful and impotent fool;  
a cruel jokester;  
an absentee landlord.

Yet it is significant that Jesus would instruct us in the character of God by pointing to the relationship that lies at the heart of God. This picture is the corrective to, the needed word of protest against every picture of God as cold, distant, isolated, solitary, unrelated. Against these, we can affirm that God is supremely in relation, holy and loving in God's essential self.

It tells us this: God is not distant. God is not static nor cold. God is not merely hidden, a puzzle, a riddle.

No, God is near, because God chooses to be near, because God knows within God's own being what it is to be near. God is dynamic, actively moving in and out of our lives with a movement that is the very definition of love, because, in God's own being, God is dynamic, and God *is* love.

God, who is such dynamic love within God's own being, has graciously chosen to extend that love outward,

turning the rebel,  
correcting the incorrigible,

melting the cold of heart,  
enriching the poor in spirit,  
giving to the blind new sight, and to the dead new life.

God is near, by God's own choice, showing us who God is and also showing that there is much we can never know about God, that the reality of God is depth greater than any creature can plumb. This all comes about, we are given to know it, *because* God is the Holy One who is in relation, who moves, who acts, who loves, as Father, Son, and Spirit.

It is this God who chooses to be in relationship with us, and who demonstrates that choice by God's own act, by reaching out to us through God's own Holy Spirit, teaching and touching us with the love that Christ has, so that we . . . may be brought in.

For the Spirit is our connection with Jesus. The Spirit is our connection with the Father. These are not distant from us. No, they are near to us, not because we are good, not because we are strong, or holy, or righteous, or justified by our own deeds. No, we are these because of the work of Christ and the love of God bestowed upon us powerfully by the Spirit.

God is near. God is not distant. God is near, and seeks to be in relationship, because God knows nearness and relationship alike. God reaches out to us, and seeks to bring us in, into God's own presence, where we may be filled with awe at the love that Father, Son, and Spirit have for each other, and consequently, graciously, have for us. God seeks to bring us in, in to the feast of love of which we may have a share, even now.

So, my friends, those whom I love and with whom I am in relationship, a relationship that in great part defines me, I urge you:

Come to the feast. Come into the presence of the Holy Three in One. Come into proximity with the fellowship that the Holy Three share with one another. Come, not by your own strength, for none of us have such strength sufficient to approach God unbidden and unaided; come, rather, by the power of God.

Come, "because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

Let us truly be those who have been brought in.