

**“MAKE THEM ONE: REFLECTING THE IMAGE OF
GOD IN COMMUNITY”**

Genesis 1-2; John 17

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I want to take you back to before the beginning. What was there before there was anything else?

Answer? God.

God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God. The Three in One, Trinity God.

“In the beginning GOD created the heavens and the earth.” Genesis 1:1

“And the SPIRIT of God ...” Genesis 1:2

“And God SAID: Let there BE... (WORD)” Genesis 1:3

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:1

We go three verses into the Bible and we make an incredible discovery: That community begins with God.

That God IS a community.

That God is three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in one being.

This is called the doctrine of the Trinity. God’s plurality (more than one) in singularity (oneness) is a community.

But not just any community – a community of holy love.

That God in his essential being is LOVE.

That the bonding element between the three persons of the Trinity is relational.

Community IS relationships. And when you have love in its purest form, that love cannot be contained.

Some of you can remember when you fell in love for the first time.

What did you do?

Everything began to look different.

- You started noticing beauty in the world.
- You started doing unnatural things.
- You started writing poems and listening to love songs.
- You started buying cards and flowers.

Why? Because there was another person that had captured your heart – and your heart was enlarged – and you couldn't keep your love to yourself anymore.

Your love could not be contained.

And that's the way it is with God's love. It cannot be contained. It HAS to express itself. It cannot hold back.

God IS love. It just flows out of Him. And that kind of love has to be expressed beyond itself.

I think that's a good explanation for Creation.

God did not create us because at some point in eternity, God got bored with God's self. And that the three members of the Trinity looked at each other and said:

"Let's try something different. We need to spice things up. Let's create some little puny humans and see what happens. That should be fun."

No, it's more like that when God gives God's self, Creation pours out. Goodness and flourishing and shalom.

Think about the galaxies.

They tell us that there are more than 200 BILLION galaxies in the universe (that we know of!). Our Milky Way galaxy is just one of over 200 BILLION!

These galaxies keep appearing, because it's an expanding universe. God keeps creating.

And in each one of those galaxies, there are 200 billion stars. Each one with planets and motion.

We have a Creator who loves making and forming and creating, and that love just flows out of him.

But ultimately, that love is concentrated on His greatest creation – His magnum opus: Recreating his image.

See, God can create galaxies and stars and comets;

God can create mountains and glaciers and rain forests and penguins and orangutans; he can create Argentina and Croatia.

But his highest achievement is not geography or even cosmology . . . God's HIGHEST ACHIEVEMENT is creating His image.

There is a beautiful consultation within the being of God in Genesis 1:26. God says: ***“Let us make human beings (Adam) in our image, in our likeness.”***

Let US.

Obviously, there is a recognition here of the plurality within the being of God. But after the brilliant perfection of all God had created, he tops it all off with His ultimate masterpiece: ***“Let us make them in our IMAGE, according to our LIKENESS.”***

And so, in verse 27: ***“God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created he them; male and female he create them.”***

Do you see the priority of transmitting the *imago Dei*? The careful and delicate design of his image? And God said: ***“This is . . . (not just GOOD) . . . This is VERY good!”***

This story is told in greater detail in Genesis, chapter 2, when God creates a human being (an A-dam) and sets him loose in an ideal environment – the Garden of Eden.

And everything seems to be going as planned, but something interesting happens. Before sin ever enters the

world, before the Fall of humanity takes place, God says something else: ***“This is NOT good.”***

Why? Why is it not good?

“It is not good for the man to be alone” (2:18a).

Because when he’s alone there can be no community. There can be no reflection of the image. And it’s just not right. It doesn’t fit the design.

This isn’t about God giving himself a failing grade for Humanity 101. This isn’t God saying: *“Well, we really messed this one up. Scratch that plan.”*

NO! This is a poetic way to say: We can’t be a reflection of the image of God alone. We can’t be made in the likeness of God by ourselves. Because God is LOVE and God is relational . . . from the core of his being.

And so, God goes on and says: ***“I will make a HELPER suitable for him”*** (2:18b). I will make a helper, JUST RIGHT for him.

The word “helper” is an interesting word. It literally means “rescuer.” Rescuer from what? From not being “in the image.” From not corresponding to the exact specifications that God has for his image.

The problem with the word “helper,” is that it’s been extracted from its original context, and been given all kinds of connotations in terms of domesticating and subordinating the Helper.

Like God is saying:

“Poor guy, he’s working so hard in the garden trying to keep it up;

and he’s moping around all lonely.

So let’s give him a subordinate to give him a hand.

A little secretary, a little sidekick to help him with his work.”

That’s not at all the word here! The word means “rescuer.”
The word means: “partner.”

God is saying: *“I’m going to provide for him the kind of help he needs, to rescue him from this situation of being a non-community, of not being able to fully express my image, and of becoming finally what I intend.”*

And God shows his CLEAR intent here by not creating that partner (that second person) the way he had been creating everything else.

Everything that God had created had come from the ground, including the plants, the animals, and even the Adam himself.

SHE is the only living being that came from human stuff already in existence, showing the complete identity between the two . . . the SAMENESS . . . the ONENESS of the two.

See, if she had come out of the ground like him, then he might have reason to say: *“Well, she came after me, so she’s an inferior being.”*

But there’s none of that here.

Out of the one, God makes two. And then he does something else. He unites them as ONE.

Genesis 2:24: “. . . **the two shall become one . . . the two are united into one.**”

And the man is **ecstatic!** He is beyond delighted! You can just hear his exuberant joy: “YES! AT LAST! FINALLY!”

And then he breaks out into poetry: “***This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She is WO-MAN!***”

And the man joins himself to his wife, and the two become one. And it's so beautiful because finally now . . . **here is the image of God fully expressed.** Plurality in oneness!

There is community in heaven – and when God's love is poured out, the image of God is expressed through community on earth.

And then God says: “*We need a lot more of this! LET THEM MULTIPLY! Fill the earth with community, because community is good.*”

And I love to give of myself! And so, go ahead and splurge!

Have lots of babies.

EXPAND community to the max, because I want my image to multiply.”

What does all of that mean? Community is grounded in the very being of God.

But you know, community is very, very fragile . . . because community is not absolute on earth.

It **IS** absolute in heaven. Nothing can ruin community there; nothing can spoil community there.

But on earth, the image, like a mirror, can be broken.

Genesis 3 tells that tragic story.

And much of the rest of the Bible is kind of a sad commentary of the consequences of how we have been doing our best to destroy community, and of God's redemptive efforts to reinstate it.

First in the Hebrew scriptures through the chosen people of God, **who were supposed to be a showcase of what God intends**. And the purpose of all the laws that God gave them through Moses and messages of the prophets – it was all trying to show them how to be a SHOWCASE of what God intends for the world.

But they failed. ***WE failed!***

We were never able to quite pull it off. We kept messing it up.

Until, finally, in the fullness of time, God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) said: *"It's time for a new creation."*

And the **Word** . . . became **flesh** . . . and came to rescue us.

And now we come to John 17.

John 17 is a prayer that Jesus prayed during the last days of his life on earth.

He and his disciples were in the upper room for the last time.

It must have been a very emotional moment. Because Jesus has to keep reassuring them that he will not leave them as orphans, and not to be afraid, and to trust him.

The whole conversation is five chapters long (John 13-17).

Then at some point in the conversation Jesus looks up. And the disciples realize that he is no longer speaking to them.

And in what must have been an awe-inspiring moment, they become aware that they are witnessing a conversation between the members of the Trinity. That they are eavesdropping on a conversation between the Father and the Son by the Spirit.

And they listened so intently that what they heard Jesus pray became **burned into their collective memory**. And that's what we have here in John 17.

Can you imagine the moment when they realized: *“Jesus is actually praying for us! He’s praying for US.”*

He could have prayed for himself at that point; Gethsemane and the Cross was just around for corner for him, and he knew there would be indescribable suffering.

But he is praying for US.

And at the center of his attention for them was this statement:

“Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect THEM by the power of your name so that they will be united JUST AS WE ARE” (17:11).

Protect them? Protect them from what?

From persecution?

From famine?

From temptation?

From a hard life?

No. Protect their oneness!

Protect them by the power of OUR name so they will have unity!

This is an amazing statement!

Because Jesus is praying: *“I want the same oneness that prevails among us in heaven, as the eternal Trinity community, to prevail among our family on earth.”*

“I want the ONENESS that we designed in the first creation to be restored in this broken world. And I want the new creation to be expressed in their unity together now.”

Jesus is praying for the *recovery* of community; the *redemption* of community!

And it's not just a passing thought. He keeps on praying.

Look at verse 21: ***“My prayer is not for them alone (meaning the disciples then). I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of THEM may be ONE, Father, JUST AS you are in me and I am in you.”***

Who’s he talking about here? He’s talking about the church.

Through centuries, through generation after generation, he’s thinking about US. He’s praying for the reconstitution of community.

Why? So that the IMAGE can be restored and that the world will BELIEVE!

Did you pick up on the sub-plot of Jesus’ prayer?

Where there is no unity; there is no community.

And where there is no community, there is no mission.

That’s ultimately what he’s saying. **That the mission of the church is at stake.** That’s how serious Jesus is about unity.

Do you see how amazing this is?

Do you see the richness of the plan . . . the majesty of the design . . . and the persistency of the creator God in pursuing his ultimate goal and making community possible?

God is giving us his image, and trusting us to preserve it, expand it, and to honor it . . . through our oneness. Through our unity.

The apostle Paul picked up on this in his instruction to the church in **Ephesus**. (I like how *The Message* version says it):

“You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly.

You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all.

Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness.”

(Ephesians 4:5-6 MSG)

Most of you know that the Church of the Nazarene was established at Pilot Point, TX in 1908 (110 years ago).

It was the union of three different groups to promote the biblical doctrine of holiness as expressed in the teaching of John Wesley and the American Holiness Movement.

While that is certainly true, what is less well known is that at the very same time, nearly thirty other prominent groups in America held this same conviction.

So why did these three groups merge to form our denomination, but not the many others?

The three groups that merged at Pilot Point held several common ideas that were essential to their unity:

- The strong affirmation for the ordination of women.

- A baptismal theology that included infant and believer's baptism, and was not bound by a specific mode for baptism.
- The willingness to allow for freedom of conscience regarding eschatology. The early Church of the Nazarene included post-millennialists, pre-millennialists, and a-millennialists.
- A view of divine healing that did not exclude modern medicine.
- A shared believers' church ecclesiology.

While many other holiness denominations held exclusive and narrow viewpoints on these issues, the Church of the Nazarene chose to unite holiness people around middle-way (via media) practices.

We have never been at our best as a church when we live in the extremes.

But perhaps the most extraordinary thing about Pilot Point was that the Church of the Nazarene was able to do what few other evangelical churches could in the divisive years that followed the American Civil War — overcome issues of regional politics, prejudice, and the lingering hatred that follows horrific conflict.

Names like Bresee, Jernigan, and Reynolds came together from north, south, and east to embrace a transformational idea:

Christian holiness can break down any walls of separation.

It was a movement of God unprecedented in American church history.

Stan Ingersol (denominational archivist) powerfully summarizes the miracle of Pilot Point:

“The union of churches at Pilot Point was a shining example of the social reality of Christian holiness.”

“At the heart of the Christian message is a word of reconciliation: first between sinners and Divine Love; and second, among the members of the human family who are estranged from one another.”

“Pilot Point signifies the reality that holiness heals hearts and unites people otherwise driven apart by sin, politics, and conflict.”

(Stan Ingersol, “Born In Hope, Borne Onward In Love”. A paper delivered June 26, 2017, for the Fraternal Delegates Luncheon in Indianapolis Indiana)

In such a time as this, in a world filled with great political strife and extreme polarities: **Can the Church of the Nazarene return to the spirit of our founders at Pilot Point?**

It was unlikely to happen then, but by the will and power of God, a union was formed.

Our founders were not able to do everything, but they have given us hope that it’s possible to also deal with the issues that divide us today.

This is our holiness legacy.

Let's get back to the point of Pilot Point.

Let's be an answer to Jesus' prayer.

Help lead us in CELEBRATING DIVERSITY . . . AFFIRMING
UNITY.

**A community of loving people, unified by the Spirit of
God, is the signature of God's image being lived out in
the world.**