

Could God be an “Us”?

A Message shared with the congregation of St. Andrew’s United Church

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Years of hearing Bible stories in worship at church growing up and I never noticed references like this one, to God being in company. I didn’t notice it, that is, until theological college. There was in fact always a great emphasis on the opposite reality – hearing references to scriptural admonishments of only one, solitary God in the heavenly realm.

In the Creation story, the word for the Creator, Elohim, is actually plural, saying: “Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness...”¹ Let us. Let **us**. It turns out that the earlier Books of the Hebrew Scriptures reflect that the people did believe in multiple deities in charge of the universe.

This famous reference in the graphic on screen is helpful to offer a bit of context. Humans being humans, they forget their humility, they aspire to being equal with God, so they build a really tall structure, a reflection of their self-perceived greatness. The period was when Babylon under King Nimrod, was at its apex of power. It was a superpower, and a global bully.

God, here – not alone, it seems – has a meeting with some kind of council, and the divine council determines that they must disperse power-hungry groups of humans. It is the Story that helps explain how cultures and languages emerged.

I don’t remember Ministers daring to name this mystery in sermons-past, but, this Trinity Sunday seems an opportunity to wonder, aloud, with you: *Who is this divine “us” being referred to in the Bible more than once?*

It is good to wonder, to sit with interesting questions and resist the temptation to consult Google for an easy theological answer. In terms of facts, we don’t have scientific fact. We do have this Biblical tradition, and the scholarly understanding that the ancient faithful of the Bible, 2,000 years before Jesus came around, believed in multiple deities. They worshipped, however, the one God called alternatively, “Elohim” and “Yahweh.”

Faced with Biblical stories of a lonely, often jealous God in my childhood sitting in worship, I would have had difficulty imagining God as not alone, but in fact in divine community. Talking about the Trinity invites us to consider that God might not be a simplistic, rather stoic, jealous, projection of our human emotions.

In fact, Biblical Story very much portrays a God wanting meaningful relationship with creation and its creaturely human beings. The Creating God of the first chapter of Genesis creates the universe incrementally, and at each stage, takes a moment to see that what was created “was good.”² So many times I sat in a pew, or watched the Cecil B. DeMille classic, “The Ten Commandments”, and witnessed an “angry”, even

¹ Gen chapter 1, verse 26.

² Genesis chapter 1, New International Version translations at <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%201&version=NIV>

seemingly vindictive God. God seemed to my naïve ears more like a rather flawed human being than a Divine.

Most Biblical scholars will remind us that the Bible is story is mediated by human creativity, reflecting particular perspectives and the context of the time. Perhaps God is perfect, but the storyteller, the neighbour of the bully who built the ridiculous, tall, tower, has a very particular perspective. Perhaps God does have a limit to their divine tolerance. We have all heard the story in the Bible of humanity getting out of control, and God sending a devastating flood to wipe out all but a small vestige of people and animals.³

Have you who were parents or aunts or uncles ever had a moment where you lost it? When our kids were very little, every Hallowe'en they would drag home these huge bags of candies. After the binging, the sugar high would drive them into this frenzy. Highs and lows, and highly resistant to directives from the parents. I had a rare moment of anger, no, simply put, I snapped. I grabbed their giant evil bowls of candies, and dumped them in the garbage – right there, in front of their horrified faces. It was utter chaos of crying, yelling. I would hate to imagine a God who has such an utterly human moment.

Today, Trinity Sunday, I suggest that this is an opportunity to reflect on our theology of God, seen through the Christian lens. There is no explicit mention of a “Trinity” in the Bible, but we have passages like the one from John today; Jesus talking about his relationship with a Companion-Spirit, and God, to whom he calls Abba – a child-like affectionate term in a tone like a child speaking to a parent. This is a beautiful image.

What if God is within a divine community, a model for our living in community on this journey of life and faith?

Of course, we cannot prove what God is like, or assess scientifically the character or substance of God. But, perhaps we can intentionally model our lives after a redemptive image of our Creator, a God who creates and is ever re-creating. What would our living be like if we remember: we are created in the “Image of God”, a Creator in community with Christ, the embodiment of Love and Peace who lived among humanity and died loving Creation.

And imagine the Spirit woven into the Trinitarian community – the Advocate that accompanies us, the wild wind that figuratively tussles our hair, perplexes us, annoys us, but also inspires us.

Imagine! That is what faith and theology is about. Leaning into wondering how we can each: embrace love in spite of hate that seems at times to prevail; and walk the difficult path of truth when surrounded by misinformation.

Imagine leaning into modelling our lives after a God who loves community, who welcomes the lonely and the shunned into safety and care – modelled after a God who calls us to build, and live within, community.

³ Genesis chapters 6 & 7:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+6%2C+7&version=NIV>