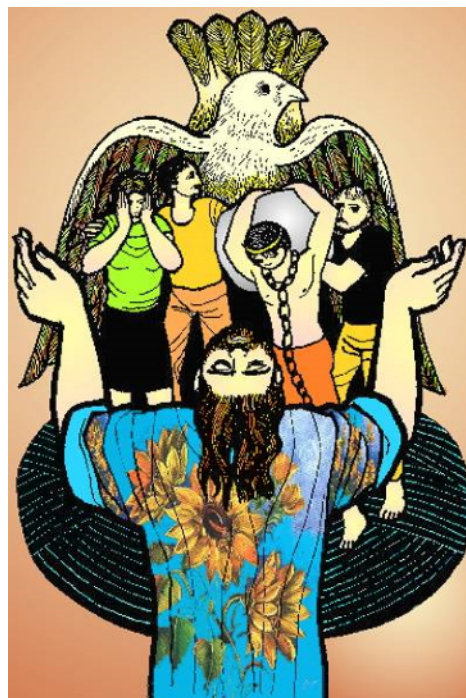


Centre Congregational Church, U.C.C.  
Sunday Morning Service, 10:00am  
May 14, 2023  
The Rev Dr Scott Couper  
Sixth Sunday after Easter  
Mother's Day and the Festival of the Christian Home

'Another Comforter?'  
Christian Scripture: John 14:15-21



Credit: *Groups de Jesus*, Jose Antonio Pagola,  
<https://www.gruposdejesus.com/6th-easter-a-john-1415-21/>

Most people, most Christians understand, the Trinity to be about 'three persons'. For those of you who are Christian in spirit, but not necessarily Christian in knowledge, the Trinity is a theological/philosophical concept/model of God that understands God as three *identities*: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

This tripartite model is *not* intended to make God manageable, or definable, limited, or even divisible. No! However, we perhaps have railroaded the concept of the Trinity to do the opposite of that which is intended! The concept of the Trinity is intended to expand, widen, deepen, and even explode our narrow and restricted anthropomorphized conceptions of God. In short, the Trinity makes God bigger, not smaller!

This morning, I would like for us to continue to make God bigger so that God can play a greater and thus more influential role in our all our lives. As I said, the Trinity is most often conceived of and stated to be “God in three persons”: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But like all models or symbols, the representations, the names ‘Father’, ‘Son’, and ‘Holy Spirit’, are much too narrow to capture God. So, in contemporary theology, we often say the Trinity is also, in parallel, ‘Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer’. The word ‘Creator’ seeks to demasculinize God. For God is not male. God does not have a penis. If anything, if God is Creator, then God is more female than male. If I had to choose between the two sexes, God as Creator is better conceived of as a mother rather than a father.

The Redeemer is ‘Jesus’. Jesus is the one who saved. Jesus is the shepherd who found us. Taught us. Jesus redeems us from our captured selves.

And, finally, the Holy Spirit is the ‘Sustainer’. We used to call the Holy Spirit the ‘Holy Ghost’. But, that’s too ‘spooky’. So, we changed ‘ghost’ to ‘spirit’. The

Holy Spirit sustains us, keeps us going, gives us energy, endurance, vitality, relevance, and perseverance!

This morning, what if instead of conceiving of God as the God of three *persons*, what if we conceive of the God as the God of three *times*: God of the past, the present, and the future? What if we said the Trinity is God of the Past, the God of the Present, and the God of the Future! If we were to do this, we might have to change their order around.

Envision this possibility with me: the God of the Past is Jesus. He lived over 2,000 years ago. He knew, he lived, he demonstrated, he taught, he exemplified, he embodied the wisdom of God and the teachings of all the prophets from Moses to John the Baptist. We have the four gospels to remind us of what Jesus once taught, primarily through demonstration, in the past.

Envision this possibility with me: the God of the future is the Godhead. The God of the future is the eschatological God, the God of the 'end time', the God of the 'great heavenly banquet', the God of heaven, the God who is the one who we will dwell with, after our earthly lives, for all eternity.

I have done almost a dozen memorial services in the past few weeks. One very special service yesterday remembered the life of Gary Carrier. At the gravesite, I emphasized that nothing God created is destroyed, it is only

transformed and we like Gary will be reunited, perfectly and eternally, with our Creator.<sup>1</sup> So, that is the God of the Future.

I would like to conclude with the God of the Present: the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup> In our gospel this morning, Jesus consoled his disciples. He consoled them in all of, what are called in the Johannine gospel, the 'Farewell Discourses'. These are loooooong monologues Jesus spoke or prayed. The writer intended that these monologues reassure an early church community under persecution that God has not left them. Before Jesus ascended to the Father, Jesus told his disciples, 'I am soon to be the God of the Past, the God you only remember and who you miss' (John 15:19). Jesus then said to Thomas who expressed great angst about Jesus' imminent departure, "I will not leave you orphaned!" (John 14:18). I am coming back to you in a little while. Then in verse 26, Jesus told the disciples, 'In order not

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<sup>1</sup> This is also the first law of thermodynamics which is a formulation of the law of conservation of energy, adapted for thermodynamic processes. "The total energy in a system remains constant, although it may be converted from one form to another. Also, energy (and hence matter) can either be created [except by God in Genesis] or destroyed.

<sup>2</sup> Park, Kyung-mi. "John." Daniel Patte, Ed. *Global Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Abington Press, 2004. "John identifies the manifestations of the Spirit in the midst of persecutions and trials in the disciples' mission (as in the Synoptic Gospels) with Jesus' ministry. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus is described as under trial; John seems to say that the persecution his community presently suffers is comparable to Jesus' own trial. Through this identification, Jesus is standing for the community. Through these shared circumstances of persecution and harassment, the community and Christ become one through the *Paraclete*. Thus, the *Paraclete* is the Spirit that leads the community to concentrate on life here and now. God's history and future plans are manifested in their life, burdened with persecution and missionary work. Here and now, in the life of the community, the past and the future are integrated. The *Paraclete* transformed the present time (in which the community experienced the presence of Christ amid its persecutions) into God's time (an eschatological time)."

to leave you alone, the Advocate, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who the Father, the God of the Future, and I, the God of the Past, will send to you to uphold you, advise you, sustain you, even admonish you, affirm you, and guide you. When I ascend to the Father and become the God of the Past (and thus revert to the being the Christ and one with the Father), we both will send the God of the Present, the Holy Spirit, to you until you dwell again in perfection with all three' (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit is the God of the Present!

Friends, today we celebrate Mother's Day. I know my experience is not everyone's experience. But yesterday I phoned my parents, who include the female person that gave birth to me. I shared with her things that I told her I am not sharing with others. She is a confidant. That's the Holy Spirit, a confidant that we can confide to in prayer today!

I confidant can tell you tough things that maybe you do not want to hear. Believe me, there have been times in my life where my mother warned me, "Scott, don't be an idiot". Similarly, the Holy Spirit is a voice caution and counsel in times of need.

My mother, above all, always affirms me. No matter what. I feel unconditionally supported. That is the what the God of the Present does. God affirms us – why? Because God created us and therefore loves us. The Holy Spirit is the God of reason and balanced perspective borne of knowledge and

experience. Such is the case of the Holy Spirit. Both mothers and the Holy Spirit give advice. Sometimes it is taken, sometimes not. And we are to bear the consequences of our poor decisions. Yet, whether a child chooses right or wrong, the love still remains because love from God and from a mother are uniquely unconditional in nature. Jesus shared with his disciples that the God of the Present, the Holy Spirit, 'will teach you everything, and remind you of all that [the God of the Past], me, [Jesus], have said to you' (John 14:26).

We often say God is the 'Alpha and the Omega'. God is the 'First and the Last'. Jesus the Christ, is very much the Alpha, the first letter of the Greek alphabet. In John's gospel, "*In the beginning, the Word, Jesus (the God of the Past), was (with) God*".

God is also very much the Omega, the last, the last letter of the Greek alphabet. The Omega is the God of our own end time (our death). God is the God of the Future with whom we will dwell after our own earthly death.

God is also, perhaps, most importantly the God of the Present. She is with us now. She is present. She loves us unconditionally. The Holy Spirit gives us advice and counsel. In her affirmation of us, she is our 'Advocate', the Divine 'Helper'. The Holy Spirit is our 'Comforter'. She consoles us when the world beats us down.

Friends, Happy Mother's Day! Whether your mother has transformed to the next life or whether your mother is with you presently, know that like a mother, the Holy Spirit guides us. She is the God of the Present, from where we came in the past and with whom we will reunite in the future. In the meantime, continue to hold her in your heart and listen to her today.

This was the word of God, and it was preached to the people of God, and the people of God responded, "Amen".