

The New Normal: A God Fully Known
Acts 2:14a, 22-36

We live in a world today that doesn't understand how to get to know each other. We are living in a world today that doesn't take the time to sit and talk with one another. This has been shown blatantly, and somewhat horrifically, to be true as we see the protests across the country, some peaceful and others violent. Do we take the time to hear one another? Do we actually care about knowing other people's stories? Do we listen to an individual or do we think we know because of what they look like or what they do for a living? We can't know one another until we take the time to do it. We are so busy talking past one another that no one stops to hear what the other is saying. It's an incredible thing. I had to finally shut off my facebook because so many people are blurting out what they think without being forced to hear the opinion of another. How can we grow in understanding? How can we get to know another person? How can we actually form functional relationships with people when no one wants to sit down and talk? You can say that our dysfunction comes from other things. You can claim it is systemic or genetic or whatever you want. But the moment we stop learning about each other is the moment we stop caring about one another. This is true in friendships and marriages. It is true between strangers. When someone isn't fully known then you are forced to fill in the gaps. You are forced to make your own call. You end up making sweeping generalities about them that may not be true at all. What can we do to start learning about other individuals?

We are continuing our conversation on "The New Normal" this week as we march on forward from the day of Pentecost. There are things expected from the church as it is formed on that holy day. As the Holy Spirit fills the disciples, they speak the word of God and transform people's hearts. This new movement of the Church strays from what once was to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. It means we look different from the world. It means we are set apart for a different purpose. It means we speak for justice and forgiveness. It means we stand for restoration and healing. It means we fight the urge to put self first and primarily care for the needs of others. It means we love unconditionally and without hesitation. Last week we talked about the diversity of God's family, that all are invited in. We are that voice of welcome and belonging in a sea of chaos and division. We have no other agenda than the gospel story of Jesus penetrating the hearts of all people, turning them away from sin into the arms of God. We fight the temptation to take sides or join in on the dividing to share the powerful message of Jesus. This New Normal needs to be explored as we venture out into the world ourselves because life is different now. Life is different after an encounter with Jesus. Life is different for us leaving a COVID-19 hibernation. How do we navigate it all? What should our lives look like now?

Today is Holy Trinity Sunday, a traditional celebration on the liturgical calendar used to recognize the full personhood of God. Christians worship one God in three distinct persons. One God, fully known in the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three have been present in the Godhead since creation, that is evident in Genesis chapter one. We confess these three persons in the creeds: God the Father, who created heaven and earth. God the Son, who redeemed that creation by his sacrifice on the cross. God the Holy Spirit, who works in our hearts so that we may believe and live as God's children. God has revealed himself to us fully as we are fully known to him. Peter explains this to the crowds, the same crowds we focused on last week. In his powerful sermon he explains who God is and what he has done for each of us. He lays out the foundation for belief. God has created you. He has created all people in his image. He knew you before you were formed in your mother's womb. God has saved you from sin and death. Jesus died on the cross in your place. He rose from the grave, giving us victory over death and a hopeful future beyond the brokenness of today. God has sanctified you. His Holy Spirit stirs in each of our hearts, continually drawing us back to himself, back into lives that honor his name. This is a God fully known. This is God revealing himself to us. God is not hidden. We don't need to find him. He is out in the open, working in the world, doing all of these things with the sole focus of fixing what we destroyed, restoring

what we shattered. Do we take the time to hear this? Are we listening as God shows who he is to us? Or are we too busy shouting our own agendas? Are we too busy demanding that we be heard?

The realities of the Trinity are complex. We can grasp the concept but it can still confuse us. Three persons, one God. The Father is 100% God. The Son is 100% God. The Holy Spirit is 100% God. Yet all three together equal 100% God. All are needed to understand the work and will of God, yet they are all one God. Distinct yet united. It's difficult to fully grasp it, I know and yet we understand it in the practical sense. Don't tune me out because listening is important in learning who God is and what he cares about. This gift of revealed knowledge is given to the church. God shows his followers who he is so that we can share that with our neighbors. He shows us all that he is so that we can make him fully known to the world. When we stop and listen to who he is we also are shown how to stop and listen to others. Do you think someone will listen to what I have to say about anything, let alone God, unless I've earned it by listening to them? How can I effectively share God with someone without knowing what aspects of God they need the most? God fully reveals himself to us so that we know how to engage our community with the gospel.

The New Normal in our faith life is this: we no longer have to wonder about who God is. We don't have to worry about whether he is active in the world. We don't have to fear the unknown about him because it is all laid out for us. We securely rest in our Heavenly Father's arms. We have a sure and certain salvation because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. We can hear the voice of God calling us back into communion with him because of the work of the Holy Spirit. The complexity of God is shared in realities of the Trinity. Those three distinct persons work harmoniously to create and sustain us, to forgive us over and over, to nudge us to courageous acts of mercy toward our neighbor. We might take this teaching, this revelation for granted but think of what it meant to the first believers? It's like all the dots were being connected right before their eyes. The tapestry of salvation being knit together right in front of them as Peter spoke his magnificent message. It all made sense. It all fits together. God has every base covered. He envelops the whole world with his power and love. He is present and active in our world, despite what we see when we look out the window. It brings a sense of relief, of joy, of peace. If you need any of that. If you need a reminder of who God is in the midst of the violence and unrest then listen to him speak through his church. Let what he speaks drown out the shouting and the opinions and the protests and the anger and the news and the facebook statuses. Listen to who God is fully and be fully changed.

So how does this affect the new normal of our lives today? Remember, the church was formed to push out into the world and change it. The church wasn't formed to be a social club that cares only about itself. As God reveals himself to us, we reveal him to the world. But we need to listen first. We need to be the examples of how to listen and learn. We need to be the models for how relationships are formed and maintained. We need to be on the front lines of community building. It has to be us. It has to be or else some other message with seep in and muddle it all up. Conversations and relationships break down when the foundation isn't the truths found in the Trinity. I see you as an image bearer of God, created in his likeness and I must treat you that way. I see you as a person forgiven by the blood shed by my Lord Jesus and I must treat you that way. I see you as potential family in the kingdom of God and I must treat you that way. When one member hurts, we all hurt. When one member is lost, we chase after them to bring them back. When one member is estranged, we reach out with arms of grace and hearts of reconciliation. We seek understanding so that they can fully know a God who knows and loves them fully. That is our responsibility. That is our new normal.

It is pretty amazing that we are stepping out of a COVID quarantine into the fires of misunderstanding and mistreatment. This is the perfect opportunity for the church to come out of the shadows, out of our homes, right into the blistering fray and speak the truth of who God is and what he thinks about each of us. Before we step out and share our word, we need to earn the right to be heard. I wish everyone thought that way by the way, but we can show them. We can show up. We can listen. We can put in the time so that we can have a turn to share the only medicine that can heal the deep wounds that divide our country and

communities. It isn't an article shared with bad assumptions and without context on facebook. It isn't kneeling and begging forgiveness for the sins of our forefathers. It isn't unnecessary force or violent demonstrations. It is living out the characteristics and priorities of God. It is sharing the truths of our God, fully revealed in scripture. A God that loves each of us as his dear children, no matter what our opinion is of Him. It is a God who sees us in our sin and rebellion and still dies the death we deserve. It is a God who unites us as fictive kin, adopted into his family, through the blood of Jesus. If we can listen to His word. If we can hear the plight of the oppressed. If we can show them a God who saves, maybe the new normal will be a better place. Not full of anxiety or fear or mistrust or second guessing. But of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. That's what we bring to the table as we reveal not our agendas but the gospel agenda that comes in the kingdom of God. How will this world hear it unless we tell? How will they know unless we share? Why would they listen unless we gave them a reason to? Why would they even care unless they know we do? This new normal is challenging but necessary as we usher in the kingdom of God, not the kingdoms of this world. Amen.