Title: Knowing the Triune God at Cornerstone

***Introduction***

1. I find myself in a very precarious position tonight.

a. There are a number of middle and high school students who finished the school year this week.

b. I am the only thing standing between you and ice cream.

c. I have been given the task to explain to you a notoriously difficult feature of Christianity: the doctrine of the Trinity.

d. So, why should you teenagers turn your brains back to the “on” position and why should everyone put ice cream out of your mind to think deeply with me for about the next half hour?

2. Analogy #1: Love seeks to understand its object.

a. Imagine that I greet Sara and compliment her blonde hair, short height… let’s watch a football game!

b. Will Sara be flattered?

c. Despite my deep affection, I would not truly love Sara.

d. True love seeks to understand its object.

e. The love, understanding, experience cycle → intimacy develops.

f. Let us not imagine that our relationship with God is different. Love seeks understanding. Understanding produces deeper love and experience.

g. At CCC, the Trinity matters deeply to us because God matters deeply to us. The mental strain of contemplating the Trinity is a joy because it helps us “get more of God.”

3. Roadmap of sermon

a. We will not be based in one passage but will be looking across the Bible.

b. Part 1: What is the Doctrine of the Trinity?

c. Part 2: Understanding → Transformation – how does the Trinity shape the way that we experience God?

d. Special emphasis: What does the Trinity mean for CCC?

e. Big Idea: May we strive to understand and experience the Triune God as a church.

***A. What is the Doctrine of the Trinity?***

*The term “Trinity” is found nowhere in the Bible. There is no single passage in the Bible that seeks to explain the details of the Trinity. Does that mean the Trinity is unbiblical? No, the Trinity is the only way to do justice to three very clearly biblical ideas.*

*Credit: Wayne Grudem,* Systematic Theology. Recommend *Christian Beliefs* (reference *Bible Doctrine*).

*Three Biblical Statements:*

1. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons.

a. What this means: The Father is not the Son, etc.

b. Jesus’s baptism (Mt 3:13–17; Mk 2:9–11; Lk 3:21–22; Jn 1:32–34) shows all three persons present at the same time.

c. Jesus prays often in the Bible. To whom does he pray if he is not distinct from the Father?

d. Our statement of faith (can be found online under “I’m New” → “What We Believe”) lists Acts 7:55 as the scriptural support for the doctrine of the Trinity.

i. Stephen, an early disciple, has angered the Jewish leaders with his preaching and is about to be killed.

ii. Acts 7:55: But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (NIV®)

2. Each person is fully God.

a. That the Father is fully God is assumed throughout the Bible, especially when Jesus prays to him.

b. The Bible affirms in many places that Jesus is fully God.

i. Recommend *Putting Jesus in His Place* by Robert Bowman, Jr., and Ed Komoszewski.

ii. The central confession of the NT - “Jesus is Lord” - is, in fact, a confession of Jesus’s deity.

iii. Briefly, I would like to show you that John’s Gospel makes it abundantly clear that Jesus is God.

a. John 1:1 (in which Jesus is “the Word”) – In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

*Now, at the end of the book Jesus has died and been raised again. He appeared to his disciples, but Thomas, one of his disciples, was not there. Thomas said that he did not believe Jesus was really alive and that he would only believe if he saw the nail-wounds in his hands and touched them with his finger and placed his hand in the wound in his side. Eight days later, Jesus appeared to the disciples again, this time with Thomas present. Hear the exchange that happens.*

b. John 20:27–28 – Then [Jesus] said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.” Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

*Seeing Jesus raised from the dead, Thomas believes and confesses Jesus as his Lord and God. Thomas clearly believes now that Jesus is God. This is huge, but Jesus and John make Thomas’s confession even “huger.” They think that Thomas’s words have big implications for you and me. Hear the verses that follow.*

c. John 20:29–31 – Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you believed; blessed are those who have not seen and have believed.” Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

*Jesus turns the focus away from Thomas towards people who, without seeing or touching Jesus, will come to the same conclusion as Thomas: that Jesus is their Lord and God. Jesus calls this faith. John then tells us that he has written the things that he has written in his book so that we, who have not seen Jesus, may believe. So, the whole point of the book of John is that we may, without physically seeing or touching Jesus, come to confess with Thomas “Jesus is my Lord and my God.” And here is found eternal life!*

d. Why am I taking so much time to hammer on this one point?

i. The deity of Jesus is not merely an idea in the Bible. It is the center of the Bible and the foundation stone (cornerstone) of the Christian faith.

ii. Our belief that Jesus is God is the only reason that we are discussing this idea called “Trinity.”

iii. Some of you are new to Christianity or are not quite sure about Christianity. This is your starting point: Who is Jesus? It is not until you have settled this question that you may progress to the Trinity.

iv. Who is Jesus to you? This is the question on which eternal bliss and everlasting shame hangs.

c. The Spirit is fully God.

i. The fact that the Holy Spirit is spoken of alongside the Father and the Son many places suggests that the Spirit is a person equal in deity to the Father and the Son.

ii. Acts 5:3–4

a. Context: A husband and wife (Ananias and Sapphira) conspired to sell a piece of property and brought some of the money to give to the church. However, they told everyone that they were giving all of the money, but, in fact, they were lying.

b. Text: Then Peter said, “Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings but to God.”

*Summarize points so far. Do we believe in three gods?*

3. There is one God.

a. Deuteronomy 6:4–5 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

b. James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that–and shudder.

*Summarize 3 biblical statements. Belief in the Trinity means that we hold all of these statements to be true at the same time.*

*There are several Trinitarian passages in the Bible, but I think that the one verse in the Bible that most neatly summarizes the Trinity comes in Jesus’s Great Commission which he gives to his disciples at the end of Matthew*

*Matthew 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

*Cornerstone’s statement of faith* (II.2)

We believe in one God eternally existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Trinity).

a. One God, three persons.

b. The word “eternally” is important. We do not believe that God merely functions in three different roles. We believe the three persons are distinct from one another and have co-existed for all of eternity.

c. What we teach Emma: one God → three persons → always.

*Transition: It is so important for us to have a right understanding of the Trinity as a church. However, understanding is not enough. Consider that the Devil believes in the Trinity. Nonetheless, his heart is unmoved.*

***B. How should the Trinity transform our church?***

1. May we be enamoured by the greatness of God.

a. Poor analogies.

i. When discussing the Trinity, people love to bring up analogies (St. Patrick [5th century]: the 3-leaf clover; also, egg, water, etc.).

ii. However, no analogy can accommodate all three statements above and, therefore, if pressed too far leads to some kind of Trinitarian heresy (clover: violates statement #2; water: violates statement #1).

b. I’m more interested in why none of the analogies work.

c. Yet another analogy!

i. Credit and recommendation: CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

ii. Setting up the analogy: understanding 3 dimensions.

a. 1D: line

b. 2D (length and heighth): many lines make one figure

c. 3D (length, heighth, and depth): many figures make one solid body.

iii. Lewis quote (page 133 of *Mere Christianity*):

Now the Christian account of God involves just the same principle. The human level is a simple and rather empty level. On the human level one person is one being, and any two persons are two separate beings—just as, in two dimensions (say on a flat sheet of paper) one square is one figure, and any two squares are two separate figures. On the Divine level you still find personalities; but up there you find them combined in new ways which we, who do not live on that level, cannot imagine. In God’s dimension, so to speak, you find a being who is three Persons while remaining on Being, just as a cube is six squares while remaining one cube. Of course we cannot fully conceive a Being like that; just as, if we were so made that we perceived only two dimensions in space we could never properly imagine a cube.

d. Does it not ring true?!

e. The doctrine of the Trinity reminds us of God’s unfathomable greatness.

*Sara: The Trinity is not meant to make us feel stupid but small.*

f. God’s supremacy should turn us to his centrality.

i. Consider that for a very long time, many scientists have been aware of the greatness of the sun. However, Copernicus started a revolution when he suggested that the sun was not only great but was also the center of the solar system.

ii. God’s greatness suggests that he is also central.

g. Application (individual and corporate)

i. Christianity is not about fitting God into your life. It is about placing your life into the context of God’s triune majesty. Is the Triune God the sun of the solar system of your life?

ii. Our church is temporal; God is eternal. May our passion be not for the success of CCC but for the praise of the name of our great God.

*Review with slide: How should the Trinity transform our church? May we be enamoured by the greatness of God.*

*Transition: The doctrine of the Trinity shows us that the supreme being is yet a being who is near and relatable.*

2. May we seek intimate relationship with the triune God.

a. The Trinity reveals something about God’s fundamental nature.

i. Consider this statement: God is love.

ii. Was God love before he created people?

iii. God’s very nature is to live in love and relationship. The entirety of the Christian life is about God’s love, which has existed within himself for all eternity, being turned out towards us. It is about us be taken up into the love and relationship which exists between the persons of the Trinity.

b. The entirety of the Christian life is about experiencing God as Triune.

i. Salvation

a. The Father plans and sends.

b. The Son is our mediator.

c. The Spirit brings life and removes the veil from our eyes.

d. Consider the doctrines of reconciliation and adoption. God the Father becomes God my Father (Jesus told Mary Magdalene that he was going to “my Father and your Father”).

ii. Prayer

a. Jesus taught us to address our prayers to “Our Father.”

b. We are to pray in Christ’s name – we approach the Father through the Son.

c. Romans 8 teaches that it is by God’s Spirit that we cry out “Abba! Father!”

d. In prayer, you experience God as Triune.

iii. Scripture

a. The Bible is the word of God, by which we mean the Father.

b. 2 Peter 1 tells us that the authors of Scripture were “carried along by the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit is the agent of inspiration in the writing of the Bible.

c. Jesus (John 5) tells us that the Scriptures testify about him.

d. When you read the Bible, you experience God as Triune.

c. Application

i. The shape of the entire Christian life is Trinitarian.

ii. Christianity is not about becoming better people. It is about knowing God. It is about being swept up into the love and relationship that has always existed within the Triune God. Come, know God.

iii. Dear Christian, seek communion with God.

*Slide: How should the Trinity transform our church? May we seek intimate relationship with the Triune God.*

*Transition: Is this a solo mission? The nature of the Trinity suggests that we should not expect it to be.*

3. May we reflect the Trinity by doing life together in love.

a. Context: Jesus is praying to his Father the night before his death on the cross. He has been praying for his disciples but now he turns and prays for all who will believe through his disciples – that’s us!

b. John 17:20-21

My prayer is not for them alone. 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. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

c. Jesus prays two things here:

i. May they be one like us.

a. We are to reflect the Trinity as a community of distinct and different people who nonetheless are united together by love.

b. Does our love for one another look like the love that exists between God the Father and the Son?

c. Applications:

i. Good place to begin: get to know one another. Have people over for dinner, meet up for coffee, stay for the ice cream fellowship.

ii. Recognize that relationships are built around points of common interest. May our friendships not rest on how much we love the Patriots or the same TV shows but on a common love for Jesus.

iii. Join a small group.

iv. Become a member.

v. Remember the why.

*How should the Trinity transform our church? May we reflect the Trinity by doing life together in love.*

ii. May they be one in us.

a. Our love for one another is part of our experiencing communion with the Triune God.

b. Hear how Jesus says it a few verses later (v. 26):

I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

c. Christ’s desire is that the love the Father has for Him may come to be experienced by us as a community.

d. Growing up in rural Louisiana, most people claim to be Christians but are not a part of the church in any significant way. A lot of peopler claim that they can worship God just as easily on the deer stand. Why would we expect to be able to fully experience a God who is a Trinity in isolation from others?

e. We experience the Triune God most fully when we experience him together.

*So, tonight I hope that you understand the doctrine of the Trinity. I hope you understand what we mean when we affirm that we believe in One God who exists eternally in three persons. But, I hope you also are getting a vision for how understanding the Trinity can transform how we function as a church, a church centered on God’s greatness and a church which seeks to know the Triune God as a community.*

*Big Idea: May we understand and experience the Triune God as a community.*

***Conclusion***

A. Analogy: Imagine that you are going on a hike to explore a large piece of beautiful country in the Maine wilderness.

1. What will you need before you are able to explore the beauty of the land? A map!

2. When you have studied your map, do you now know the Maine wilderness? Of course not!

3. Your map is necessary but insufficient.

B. Application of analogy

1. Consider the doctrine of the Trinity like a map.

2. You must understand these basics, but they are of no help if they do not propel you into the exploration of the beauty of who God is.

3. May we as a church be committed to making certain that our map is accurate but also that it is used.

4. May we grow in our understanding and experience of God – may we know him and know his love.

Benediction: 2 Corinthians 13:14 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.