

“Who Is God Anyway? (Happy Together)” based on John 17:1-12, Psalm 68:1-11

Delivered by Pastor Drew Mangione on Sunday, May 21, 2023, at Shelby Presbyterian Church

Today’s reading comes from the High Priestly Prayer of Jesus in John’s gospel, which we are told was given on the night Jesus was betrayed and handed over by the people of Judea to the magistrates of Rome to be crucified. Like other long dialogues in John’s gospel, it is easy to get lost in it. Listening to Jesus speak in dense theological language is tough.

Jesus here is in this prayer, both advocating for his disciples, and giving an explanation of who he truly is, as one with the Father. He is the Word made flesh, as John states at the outset of his gospel, framing everything he writes after.

All this talk of glorifying the Son to glorify the Father, and alongside the Father, in the glory Jesus had before the world existed, and what’s mine is yours, yours is mine, eventually leads to Jesus speaking of his oneness with the Father, and that all of us who believe in him, might be one with him. He says that those who kept him, the Word, might be kept by the true God, in God’s name, which was given to Jesus and is his identity.

All of this back-and-forth language is confusing, I know. We can’t all expect to get it right away. And so, often when I am reading this text, I find myself humming along in song. Indeed, when I read this part of John, I can’t help thinking of the song, “Happy Together.” Yes, the song by the Turtles that hit number one on the US Billboard charts in 1967.

The original is a love song and I’m aware that some may consider it a bit creepy, but nonetheless, it’s catchy, and one that gets stuck in our heads easily. The original starts with, *“Imagine me and you, and you and me, I do, I think about you day and night, it’s only right, to think about the girl you love, and hold her tight, so happy together.”*

But in my admittedly deranged head, I start adapting Jesus’s words to this tune: *“Imagine, you in me, I do, Also, me in you, day and night, it’s only right, Just like the Father is in me, and I’m in him, so happy together. If you should glorify, your only Son, And you say that I belong to you, that we are one, Imagine, all humanity, one with me, So happy together.”*

I put Claire through this, and she said to spare you the whole thing, but here’s the refrain: *“I can’t see me losin’ nobody from them, I give my life. They kept your Word, Father, I pray for them, And give my life!”* Forgive me as I go on: *“Me in you, and you in me, And now I’m your Word in flesh, their flesh in me, We’re sharing our love and life, eternally, So happy together. I can’t see me losin’ nobody from them, I give my life. They have your Word, Father, I pray for them, And give my life!”*

Oh, there’s more: *“Mine for you, you give to me, Now I’m no longer in the world, it had to be, Now keep them in your name, you gave it to me, So happy together. Ba-ba-ba-ba ba-ba-ba-ba ba-ba-ba ba-ba-ba-ba Me in you, and you in me, And now it’s me in them as well, and them in me, and now may they be one in you, as you and me, So happy together. So happy together. So happy together, I’ll keep you forever, So happy together, We’re happy together, Eternal, forever, Happy together.”*

Now that I’ve tortured you with my terrible singing, I’m not going to apologize. I hope that this song is now stuck in your heads, with these new lyrics. Perhaps, I should have had Sherry or Bruce up here to sing them for you. It certainly would have been less painful. All the same, my choice to

sing wasn't meant to annoy you with 60s pop, but to drive home the point of what Jesus is saying here, because I want you to remember why, who Jesus *is* matters.

The identity of Jesus in being one with the Father, and our identity as one with him, is not some dense theological idea meant to ache our brains to understand it. It is a reality intended by God to make us "happy together, eternal, forever." This is because the God who the psalmist says is the one who rides on the clouds, an image for the high God in Israel and in most ancient religions. This God is, in the Christian mindset, the same God who became human just like you, who through the Son, shared in your human life and mine. This was not to exploit us, as found in other religions, such as when Zeus slept with mortals. No, the true God instead came down to us, for humanity in creation, to give us new life.

Indeed, as Jesus said, this life is eternal, perpetual, for all ages. And this is what that life is: It is to know the one true God, and know him, the Son, sent to be the Christ or Messiah. Our anointed King did not come to us because God needed something from us, but because God made us to love us, to know us, and to share this life with us. What's more, this is not simply a promise made for after we die, but this is a life right now, born of God's love poured into us. It is by Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension, the Holy Spirit has come down to us, to live in us, and to live among us, as the church, to restore all of creation in him.

The good news is not something we need to put off, waiting for our death to find eternal life. No, this is something to embrace right here and right now, to transform us, to change us, so that we might transform this world, change this world, for the better. Imagine what it means for the Son, who is one with the Father to become one with us and die for us, in our flesh, in our life in full, even our suffering, our helplessness, and our weariness.

In Jesus, we find union with God, and in him all the evil of this world – sin and death – were taken on that cross and defeated so that all mortal human beings, regardless of Jew or Gentile, might have joy, power, and strength, to join in God's work here on earth.

Walton Moore, whether he knew he was doing this or not for his Eagle Scout project shared in God's work of creation, by leading the design, fabrication, and deployment of 100 fish habitat structures in Moss Lake, which has made life that God created more abundant and fruitful. This is for the fish, yes, but also for humanity, including all of us who enjoy that lake.

I was not an Eagle Scout, but this is what I admire about you all. Indeed, your projects make an impact in our world. You create things that are for the benefit of others. You create just as God created, not for God's own benefit, but for the benefit of creation itself.

My sisters and brothers, the truth of this God we come to hear about each week, is not about some distant being or force which set the planets in motion and ran away. No. Rather, God is present in this world, still creating habitats, still doing miracles, and incomprehensibly, knowing each and every one of you personally.

This Triune God is not only the source of all life in the Father, but shared in your life in the Son, and still moves in this world, by the presence of the Holy Spirit, always creating, and always creating in and through each of you.

We don't just belong to a church or come to church, no – *We are the church* – because we are one in Christ. This is not for us to feel good about ourselves, but it should be something to help each other know happiness through the life of Christ. We are part of this church to know it together and through the love of God pouring into us, through us, and out from us into the world.

To glorify God is to make God's presence known in this world, and this is what Jesus did in his death on that cross for us, and in his resurrection to begin a new creation, charging each of us by his Spirit to join him. This is what we are called to do, not just for those we love, but for all of humanity.

Indeed, every one of us in this building and throughout the whole world, bears the image of God, and has the opportunity to glorify God in this image, making God known in what we do with the love the Spirit shares. We are to be agents of God's love and justice, peace and unity, in what we do in this world to share in the work of Jesus.

We don't do good works to earn something from God, but we act in gratitude for the true God revealed in Jesus, whose Spirit marks us, and empowers us, to do the good works that God has prepared for us from the very beginning. Our job is to do these works, and to encourage each other, bearing witness to the glory of God so that all of us, from the smallest ones, like our beloved sister Kyla, who was baptized today, to the most senior among us, might know God's love, and resist the temptation to keep it for ourselves, and instead share this love in this world.

Lastly, I want us to ponder this quote from television's most famous Presbyterian Minister – Fred Rogers: *"The real issue in life is not how many blessings we have, but what we do with our blessings. Some people have many blessings and hoard them. Some have few and give everything away."*

Beloved, do not sit idly by and expect the blessings of God to be for you alone. Instead, be a blessing, be someone or do something that brings people closer to God and you will find yourself closer to God as well. You will find yourself sharing in this amazing project in the ministry of reconciliation, born of the resurrection to be a new creation in this world, and know that this is eternal life is not distant and far off, after death. No, it is faithfully living now as one with the Son, just as the Son lived faithfully in our flesh, and faithfully as fully one with the Source of all, God our Father.

Truly, let us all by God's love and presence in the Holy Spirit, know then what it really means to know Jesus and thus, know who God really is, and in the end be happy together. Amen.