

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Tony Murphy's Message of October 25, 2009
"God – First Diversity and First Unity – The Pattern for All Things"**

[Today's message highlights the significance for us, in that God, who is first in diversity and first in unity because of his triune nature, wants us to live together in unity with Him through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. God isn't about uniformity, but about unity in diversity.]

[Topics: Diversity; Unity; Uniqueness; Participation in God's Life]

Excerpt: In doing some research on the Internet, Tony came across the phrase "First Unity" having to do with the Trinity. The more he thought about it, the more he realized that God isn't just first unity he's also first diversity.

These are the goals of today's message. Show that God is the first diversity and the first unity. And then show that because God is the first diversity and the first unity, it's the pattern for all creation including us.

First, let's review the Scriptural basis for the fact that we believe in the Trinity. Jesus told us there is one God in **Mark 12:29** "**Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one**" (TNIV). He was quoting the *shema* from Deuteronomy 6:4.

John 1:1-2 "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning**" (TNIV).

In this passage we see "the Word" a few verses later in **John 1:14** identified as Jesus. Now the word "with" here is interesting. The Greek can mean "with" or it can also mean "toward" in the sense of a face-to-face intimacy. It is a face-to-face intimacy between the Father and the Son.

John 1:14, "**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only [Son], who came from the Father, full of grace and truth**" (TNIV).

Jesus said, "**Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me**" (John 14:11 TNIV)

Colossians 2:9 tells us, "**For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form**" (TNIV). So is Christ God? Yes. Jesus tells us that he is one with the Father in **John 10:30**, "**I and the Father are one**" (TNIV).

Matthew 28:19 reveals the "threeness" of God: "**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**" (TNIV).

The Holy Spirit is a person. Scripture tells us that he takes volition, that he leads – **Romans 8:14** "...those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God" (TNIV). The Holy Spirit makes evaluations. **Acts 15:28** "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (TNIV).

And when Ananias and Sapphira lied to the church about the money that they gave to it, Peter said, "**You have lied to the Holy Spirit... You have not lied just to human beings but to God**" (Acts 5:3,4 TNIV).

The difficulty for the early church was to think through all these scriptures about God – how to understand “one” and “three” – the tri and the unity. Church councils beginning with the Nicean Council in 325 AD began to articulate this understanding. And they did it in response to wrong thinking about God and to counter heresies.

So why is God the God of first diversity? Well, God the Father is unique. He is not the Son or the Holy Spirit. The Father didn't die on the cross. He didn't appear as “tongues of fire” on the apostles. Jesus Christ is unique. And the Holy Spirit is unique.

One of the early heresies was called Sabbellianism or Modalism. They were robbing God of his unique personhood of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They were teaching that there was one God and he just shows up here as the Father; he shows up there as the son; he shows up somewhere else as the Holy Spirit. And there were other heresies.

God is “First Unity” because the Father, Son and Holy Spirit by their nature of love individually choose to be one. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in an exciting, dynamic life. It's a life full of happiness and joy and wanting to please the other. It is other-centered love. There's mutual acceptance, edification, peace, harmony and creativity. The Trinity is the womb of all creation. And they “dwell” in each other.

Jesus repeatedly talked about how he and the Father were one. "**Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?**" (John 14:9-10 TNIV) And in **John 10:38**, Jesus said, "**The Father is in me, and I in the Father**" (TNIV).

And then we see that the Holy Spirit is sent by both the Father and Son. "**...the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you**" (John 14:26 TNIV).

Then Jesus also said, "**When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me**" (John 15:26 TNIV).

The Holy Spirit sent from both the Father and the Son because they are so intertwined and working together so closely that they can both say they are sending the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is bound up in their unity.

We also get glimpses of that in **John 16:13-15 TNIV**, "**...when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.**" So who is “the truth”? Jesus! This also shows the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit.

"He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14) He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you." Can you see this back and forth, face-to-face intimate sharing. This is what God is all about. **15) "All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."**

The second point is that God as "first diversity" and "first unity" is the pattern for all creation. We're all familiar with **Romans 1:20 TNIV**, **"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made."**

So when we look at creation, what do we see? **INCREDIBLE DIVERSITY AND UNITY.** Should that surprise us? Should it surprise us the Maker of all things has patterned in his creation diversity and unity?

So, is there diversity in creation? (Here are some of the responses from the audience; plants and animals, male and female, night and day; hills and valleys, colors, size and shape of people.)

How many stars are there? How many constellations? How many star systems? How many are exact duplicates of another? You know what they say about snowflakes – there are no two alike. It's the same with the star systems.

Then Tony showed slides of various kinds of flowers commenting on the different colors and the different sizes and shapes each flower looks compared to other flowers. There are flowers that point up, others point down. Some float on water. Some flowers even grow on tree branches like magnolias. What about flower fragrances? They are all different. Now some flowers don't have any fragrances at all.

Flowers are just one kind of plant. How many different kinds of plants are there? And of course there are diversities in each of those types of plants. How many different kinds of animals, birds, fish, insects, mammals are there?

Rien Poortvliet, a Dutch painter, who died in 1995, did some whimsical paintings in his wonderful collection of animal pictures, "Noah's Ark" that illustrates design decisions God had to make. (Various slides of his artwork were shown). For example, why didn't God put a tiger skin or antlers on a cow? And why did God decide to put the cow's udder where he put it? It looks as though God had great fun in designing all the varieties of animals and birds, etc.

What about sounds? There is great diversity in the types of sounds we hear like the babbling stream, the wind going through the trees; the sound of lightning, the sounds that each animal and bird make, etc. God blesses us with a diversity of sound.

What about things we can eat? Drink? Smell? Hear? Touch? The diversity is there. For example wood feels different than stone, than jello, than liquids. Diversity makes life interesting and exciting.

So, what kinds of human diversities do we have? Earlier we talked about male and female.

What about the diversity of age? Then there are the racial and ethnic diversities, personality differences, and diversity in hair color, eye color, and voices. These are just a few of the various human diversities.

What about languages? In Africa there are over a 1000 different dialects. In the world probably another thousand. And, what about our written expression? The Chinese have Kanji characters. Japanese people use Kanji, Hiragana and Katakana characters. There are Arabic characters, Hebrew characters, Thai characters, etc. All these diversities make our lives more interesting. They also enrich our lives.

So, what is the significance for us that God is first in diversity? What is Jesus doing with us? God wants us to unique persons. We've talked about that the Father is not the Son, not the Holy Spirit. God gives us the freedom of his love. God loves us even when we are his enemies. He gives us that wonderful freedom to be who we will be.

The Apostle Paul tells us in **Galatians 5:1 TNIV**, "**It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.**" And a few verses later he repeats the thought. "**You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature, rather serve one another humbly in love**" (Gal. 5:13 TNIV).

It's God's love that gives us this freedom. He wants us to be those unique individuals that we are. The point is that we are all unique and God loves that uniqueness and wants us to live in it and bless others with our uniqueness.

Since God loves and creates diversity and since that diversity brings him glory and pleasure, we should also appreciate and find pleasure in the unique differences, the individuality, of all those around us. We cherish the freedom God gives us to be who we will be in him – we need also to respect and value that freedom for every other person.

God is not about uniformity, not about making yellow pencils. But he's all about unity IN diversity. Jesus wants us to live in the same unity of love that he and the Father live in.

Jesus tells us in **John 13:34-35 TNIV**, "**A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35) By this will everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**"

The significance for us that God is both "First Diversity" and "First Unity" is that his existence – his reality – is a pattern for the Church. In **1 Corinthians 12:12-14 TNIV** we read, "**Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. 13) For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14) Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.**" So we in the church do reflect unity and diversity in one body.

Jesus prayed in **John 17:20-23 TNIV**, "**...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...so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**"

So, in summary, God is the first diversity and he is the first unity. And because of this, he is the pattern for all creation. And the implications are that he wants us to be fully persons as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are fully persons within the Trinity. And he wants us to be in complete unity, in Christ, in the church.

So, God is the "I Am" who wants us to be in him – that is participation in his life. And that is communion in him. This is a great and beautiful God that we have been made by, that we are saved for relationship by, that we are invited into communion with.

So today, we are all invited into the communion that Christ established for us and wants us to live in. So please come forward and partake of the elements of communion.

Key Scripture: John 17:20-23, "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21) 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. 22) I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – 23) I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete unity."

General Group Question: How has diversity in the world around you enriched your life?

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. How is God's diversity shown?
2. How is God's unity shown?
3. When we look at God's creation, what do we see? Briefly explain your answer.
4. Why did God create us as unique individuals?
5. Does 1 Cor. 12:12-14 show is that diversity and unity is also a pattern for the church? Briefly explain your answer. How does this enrich the church?
6. What is God's ultimate goal for all humanity?