

## **THE FATHER AND I ARE ONE**

You are who you say you are. Have you heard that expression before? You are who you say you are. Perhaps you know the story of Anna Anderson. On February 27, 1920 she literally jumped into history. She was rescued from a canal by a policeman after jumping off a bridge in Berlin, Germany. Initially she was unidentified, and was admitted to the hospital as what we would call a “Jane Doe”. She later told people that she was Anastasia Romanov- the last surviving member of the family of Tsar Nicholas and Tsarina Alexandra of Russia. Eventually she immigrated to the United States and lived out her life here.

Now, out of curiosity as I was preparing for this sermon, I checked on Wikipedia to see how many Romanov imposters there were. Full disclosure, I know very well that Wikipedia is not a reliable source, but that’s okay. I figured it would be at least a good start. Wikipedia lists seven people who claimed to be the son of Nicholas and Alexandra and the heir to the throne, Alexei Romanov, five people (including Anderson) who claimed to be Anastasia, two who claimed to be Tatiana Romanov, two who claimed to be Marie Romanov, and one who claimed to be Olga Romanov. Most of these claims appear to have been rather quickly dismissed and had only a minimal following at best.

The story of Anna Anderson is different. Her story gained wide support. Many people believed she was Anastasia Romanov. Alas, she was not. The bodies of all the members of the Romanov family have been recovered. While there is some confusion as to which body is Marie’s and which is Anastasia’s, DNA analysis confirms that all of the bodies belong to the family of Nicolas and Alexandria. Furthermore, Anna Anderson was identified by her DNA as well. She actually began her life as a Polish factory worker.

What’s amazing to me about the story is that she managed to convince a number of people (even some who knew Anastasia) that she was who she said she was- Anastasia Romanov. Even my own mother believed the story- until I told her about the DNA analysis. You are who you say you are, and if you tell people who you are convincingly enough, you can get them to believe it too.

As our story opens today, we find Jesus in Jerusalem at the time of the feast of the dedication. Scripture says it was winter and Jesus was walking in the temple in the portico of Solomon, and the Scripture says people then gathered around him and were saying to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Now, if you’ve read the Scriptures, you know that, at least in parts, Jesus often disguised his identity, asking people not to tell them who he was.

Jesus answered them, "I already told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in my father's name, testify of me. But you do not believe because you are not of my sheep. My sheep know me, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My

Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and my Father are one".

Now, there are a few issues that come out of this for me. One of those is I think it's important for us to understand what Jesus what Jesus is talking about when he says that he is the Shepherd and his followers are the sheep. A shepherd's typical day looked something like this. A shepherd would be armed with a bag to carry his valuables, a sling, a club, and a Shepherd's Rod. Early in the morning the shepherd would go down to the sheepfold and drive the sheep out to pasture. If there were a nearby vineyard, and the grapes had already been picked for the season, the shepherd would often take the sheep there so they could eat the leftover foliage. If not, the sheep would be taken to pasture. The shepherd would then spend all day fending off predators and trying to keep the sheep from injuring themselves. At night the shepherd would drive the sheep back to the sheepfold, using his rod to separate out any sheep that may have injured themselves during the day. Also, if any of the Ewes were in heat, he would try to mix them with the Rams to promote breeding. As one source I read put it, the job of the Shepherd was to provide for the sheep- to provide them with security, fertility, and provisions.

Now, there was a strange double standard concerning shepherds in the ancient world. The job of Shepherd was not a very glamorous one, and therefore, was not considered an honorable profession in the ancient world. If you were a shepherd, you could expect to be dirty and smelly. You had to sleep outdoors at night, which meant that they were unable to protect their families while they were at home in bed. Even protecting the flocks was difficult.

On the other hand, that's a good job description, a good metaphor, for another job. It's a good job description for a monarch- for a king. That's the kind of thing that the King is supposed to do. They're supposed to help provide their people with security, fertility – which might be understood as economic growth- and provision. It's no mistake, then, that many kings in the ancient world are described as shepherds. Even Jesus, who is the king of kings, described himself as a shepherd. This is what Jesus does for us; Jesus provides us with security. Jesus provides us with security in the form of salvation. None of us need fear death because of the salvation provided by Jesus Christ. In this very passage Jesus says, "I give my sheep eternal life." Which brings me to my next point, Jesus offers us eternal life, and that might be seen as that provision of fertility... that since that life is going to go on even if it ends here. Jesus provides us with provision in the form of limitless blessings.

I suppose I could end my sermon there, but there's a second part of this passage that really struck me – the part where Jesus says I and the Father are one. This part of the story touches on the most mysterious doctrine in all of the Christian faith: the doctrine of the Trinity. Here Jesus says that the Father and He are one. What are we to make of that?

Throughout our history Christians have always maintained that we worship one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Trying to explain this doctrine to you

would be impossible for me, because many theologians who are much more gifted than I have attempted that. They've wrestled with that doctrine throughout history. I can't say that I truly understand it because there's a mysterious portion to it.

Some years ago, I was watching the movie Nuns On The Run. I don't know if you've seen that movie. It's a cute little movie. In the movie two criminals are on the run from the law, and they decide to hide in a convent and they disguise themselves as nuns. The convent doubles as a Catholic school for girls. It's a Catholic High School. One of the characters is asked to explain the doctrine of the Trinity to a class of girls, which should be easy for a nun, right?- except that this guy has never been in church a day in his life. His partner, though, was raised Catholic, and attempts to describe it to him so he can describe it to the girls. He describes it as being like a shamrock – it has three leaves like the three persons of the Trinity, yet it is one plant. Being somewhat confused and somewhat forgetful, the first man then goes into the classroom and tells the girls that the doctrine of the Trinity is like a Shamrock – it is small, green, and split three ways. Not exactly the point of the doctrine.

Now truthfully, the first description is as good as any that I've ever heard. Our God is one God in three persons. The shamrock provides a great metaphor for that. The shamrock has three leaves on it, but it makes up one plant. In the same way our God has three distinct parts, but is one God. On the other hand, in some ways the second description is equally valid. You may find that hard for me to say. Why would I say that? Because the doctrine of the Trinity is such a mystery that none of us truly understand it. None of our descriptions are adequate. Even the metaphor of the Shamrock doesn't really do it justice.

Perhaps the most important thing for any of us to get out of this is that it raises a question for us. Why are we not willing to take Jesus words at face value when he says I and the Father are one? Why is it that we're prepared to believe that Anna Anderson is a princess who escaped death, but we're not prepared to believe that Jesus Christ and the Father are one.

Jesus and the Father are one! When we are dealing with Jesus, we are dealing with God. One of the things that I'm hoping to accomplish through the discipleship classes that we're doing is that I'm hoping to help this church grow spiritually over the next few months and years. I know some of you are struggling with it. Some of you have told me you're struggling with it, and that's okay. To be honest with you, I'm struggling with the material too. It's not easy to break a lifetime of habits of going to God only when we feel the need.

I've come to appreciate, that there are several questions that can help us focus on our spiritual lives. One of those questions that we need to be asking over and over and over is, "Who is your Lord?" You may think that's an easy question to answer. "That's easy! Jesus Christ is my Lord."

Is he really? Are you really submitting yourselves to Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? I don't have doubts that Jesus is my Lord and Savior, but I have doubts about how much I'm really submitting myself to be his servant. A piece of the answer to the question "Who is Your Lord?" lies right here in this passage. If I claim that Jesus Christ is my Lord, then I need to appreciate that I am claiming the Triune God as my Lord: that I'm accepting the Father, Son and Holy Ghost as my Lord. Let me stop there by saying, to that God be all the power and all the glory forever and ever. Amen.