

Third Sunday after Pentecost
June 14, 2026 • 10:30am
Trinity Episcopal Church • New Orleans, LA

The Rev. Lex Breckinridge

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.

What do you think when you think of God? What picture or image comes to mind as you try to imagine God? I mean, what does God look like?

When I was a little boy, I imagined God as being an old bearded white man with a crown on his head. He was sitting on a big throne on a cloud, which was at the same time way out there somewhere, but also uncomfortably close to my bedroom.

Unlike my grandfather, who was about the same age as God, God didn't appear to have a very comfortable lap to sit on. In fact, God looked more like Santa Claus, another guy with a long white beard. God was both the guy with the long white beard and God was also Santa.

You know, making a list and checking it twice, going to find out who's been naughty and who's been nice. Except God wasn't smiling.

As I've gotten older, and I hope maybe a little more grown up about who and what God is, I've come to realize who my childhood image of God really looks like.

Zeus! You know, Zeus sitting up there on top of Mount Olympus, throwing thunder bolts, peering into your bedrooms, throwing those thunder bolts at people, either just because he was ticked off or maybe just for the fun of it. Zeus sounds a lot like the Latin word for God, Deus. Be honest now.

At some point in your life, hasn't that been your image of God? Some combination of Zeus and Santa Claus, an arbitrary judge who either hands out presents or punishments depending on how you behave. You know, that image of God even appears in art. Just think about Michelangelo's sublime painting of the creation on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

The big white guy with the beard reaching his finger out to touch Adam's finger and bring Adam to life. It's in many ways a lovely image that reminds us of the divine energy that quickens our lives, but it also perpetuates the stereotype of God as a bearded old man. Now all of this is pretty far cry from the God we actually meet in the Bible.

You know, we hear lots of references to God as Lord of heaven and earth and God as the king of heaven, that sort of thing. I mean, that's human writers creating metaphors to describe God in all of God's awesome might, what theologians would call God's sovereignty. But you know, when God actually shows up in the Bible, as God seems to do with regularity in the Hebrew Scriptures, we get another image.

Like this morning, when we look in on old Abraham meeting God under the oaks at Mamre, three dusty strangers show up at the door to Abraham's tent. Now he doesn't really immediately recognize who this might be, but that doesn't stop him from extending lavish hospitality. He bows low, brings water to wash the feet of the three strangers, asks his wife Sarah to break out the hors d'oeuvres, and then has his servants prepare a very elaborate meal.

And then the three men ask a strange question, where is your wife Sarah? Now it helps to know Abraham and Sarah's backstory. From the beginning of this journey they've been on for years, God has been promising the childless Abraham and Sarah a son. Years have passed, and it hasn't yet happened, so they've gotten pretty frustrated.

In fact, they've really begun to lose hope. But in different ways, God's been communicating to Abraham to just hang in there, it's gonna happen. God's even

told Abraham a few chapters earlier in Genesis that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

So Abraham, have faith, be patient. And now these three strangers show up, and the next thing we know one of them says, I shall surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah will have a son. And Sarah, who's way postmenopausal, hears this and laughs, and laughs, and laughs.

But one of the strangers then reveals himself to be the Lord, and he says, why all the laughter? Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? Now, fast forward a year and Sarah has a son, just as God has promised. Her son is Isaac, Isaac who comes to be known as the son of laughter. And Sarah says, God has brought laughter for me.

Everyone who hears will laugh with me. What a brilliant story, and what a beautiful way to think about God. Not as an old white guy with a long beard, but three dusty travelers in need of shelter and refreshment.

Three dusty travelers in need of a little hospitality. In Christian literature, these three are often seen as the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Now, I really believe that, yes, these three travelers who turn out to be God tell us something profound about the Trinitarian God, and that is that God is relational.

God is to be seen, heard, understood, known, and experienced in relationship, and as a relationship. You know, in John's gospel, we hear Jesus describe what we think of as heaven. Heaven is an expansive place.

The Father's house, he calls it, and there are many dwelling places in the Father's house, many mansions, as the old King James Version puts it. You know, in my Father's house, there are many mansions. In John's telling of the story, heaven, the Father's house, is a metaphor for the relationship between Jesus and the Father, and it's in the expansiveness of that relationship between Jesus and the Father that there's room for everyone, everyone.

In his first epistle, John goes on to tell us, no one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

God is love, and love, love is only known in relationship, right? God is love, and love is only known in relationship. Love needs an object, doesn't it? Now, here's another takeaway from our story this morning, a story that shows us the relational God. It's in Abraham and Sarah's total unselfish, selfishness, their total hospitality to these complete strangers that they come to know as God.

Their hospitality showed them God's presence, and then God comes into the middle of their anxious longing. God listens to their deepest need, and then laughter, laughter. Don't you just love that? What God does in their lives is so improbable, so unlikely, so off the wall, that the only response can be laughter.

Later on in Matthew's Gospel, we're going to hear Jesus say that whenever we feed hungry people, or give a thirsty person a drink, or visit someone who's sick, or visit someone who's in prison, it's as if we're feeding or visiting him himself, as if we're feeding Christ himself. Whatever you do to the least of these, you are doing to me, he says. So you see, it's in our hospitality, it's in our generosity, it's in our relationships, in other words, that we'll see the face of God.

So, in cultivating loving, healthy, mutually sustaining relationships, we can meet the face of God. We can see God at work in the world in the midst of these relationships, and you know, we can even see God at work in the midst of our difficult relationships, the hard ones, the ones that involve people who may not be so easy to like, and you know, of course, it helps to remember that from time to time, we may not be so easy to like ourselves. An old friend of mine says she tries to begin every difficult conversation by saying to herself, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, such a beautiful way to prepare for the difficult conversations, the hard conversations, the conversations we just dread.

Try bringing that relationship, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, into the relationships you dread. You might breathe a little easier. My dear sisters and brothers, when we

Speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, it's as if we're joining old Father Abraham and welcoming those three dusty travelers into our tent under the oaks of Mamre.

When we speak hospitality and generosity, we're welcoming God. When we speak hospitality and generosity, we're joining the divine dance, the divine conversation among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There's a Greek word for that, and here's your 25-cent Greek word for the day, perichoresis, perichoresis.

It means dance, dance. That's how the earliest Christians described the indescribable. The Trinity is indescribable, so they decided to describe it as a dance, a divine dance among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And it's a dance we're all invited to join. So send the old white guy with the beard and the lightning bolts back to Greek mythology. Put the guy who's making a list and checking it twice and trying to figure out who's been naughty and who's been nice back under the Christmas tree.

Let those guys go back where they came from, and then you step into the divine dance, step into the divine flow, dive into the river of love. The next time you have a difficult conversation, the next time you're feeling alone in the universe, the next time you're feeling like it's all up to you, immerse yourself in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. You know, God isn't out there somewhere.

God is as close to you as your own beating heart. God is love.

Amen.