

Welcome

One of the most popular franchises of all time was almost taken down by a single letter.

That franchise is *Alien*, which spawned from Ridley Scott's 1979 space-horror classic. James Cameron - he of Avatar fame - released a sequel in 1986 called *ALIENS* which was more of an action film - a bunch of space marines shoot a bunch of aliens.

Cameron's version of the ALIEN lore went on to spawn a whole bunch of video games. SEGA released one in 2013 called *ALIENS: Colonial Marines*. The game is considered to be one of the worst video games ever made, in large part because of the AI that controls the aliens.

In the movie *ALIENS*, the xenomorphs are a lot like giant bugs - they run across the ground, the walls or the ceiling on four legs, lightning fast and hard to hit. In the 2013 game, they stand on their hind legs and just run straight at you. It makes the game really easy, and not really at all like the film on which the game is based.

Now, fast-forward to 2018 and the game re-releases on STEAM, which is an online platform. If you have any amount of computer coding skills, you can buy a game on STEAM and get into the code of the game.

Which is when one avid game fan discovered why *ALIENS: Colonial Marines* was such a huge failure.

Here's the line of code they found:

```
ClassRemapping=PecanGame.PecanSeqAct_AttachXenoToTether ->  
PecanGame.PecanSeqAct_AttachPawnToTeather
```

You might notice right there at the end that "Tether" is spelled wrong. Because of the way the command is structured, this code didn't break the game - it still runs. But this is the line of code that tells the game where to find the behavior AI for the aliens. When a xenomorph pops up, the game goes looking for "Teather" and can't find anything. So it just defaults to basic behaviors.

That's right - the big problem that ruined this game, that made it infamous as one of the worst games of all time - was a single typo. One errant 'a'

If you've never worked with code, it can be hard to believe that such a small mistake can have such huge consequences. But it's true!

Pretty much every coder I know has horror stories about having to comb through thousands of lines of code looking for a single typo that renders their whole program non-functional.

But when it all works, when every line is in its right place, well - we get the magic on which our whole world is built. Not just fun games, but life-saving machines, globe-connecting communications, even the software we're using to worship together as a hybrid congregation this morning.

Hang with me here, but I think code is actually a really good metaphor for the kind of oneness Jesus sets up as the goal for all his followers.

So often in the Church we think of Oneness as uniformity - we all have to look, think and act the same. But the Oneness Jesus calls us to is more like the unity of good code - we all play our part, working together to execute God's program of liberation for the world.

We each have our part to play. We each matter - in the same way each line of code, each *letter* of code matters!

Message

We're in the wake of Easter, the celebration of Jesus' resurrection. Here at Catalyst, we celebrate the resurrection not as a cool thing that happened that one time, but as an ongoing reality in which we all get to participate. Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of a new creation, a new reality that is coming into being all around us. We can learn to see this new reality breaking through the old through Jesus himself. By giving us the Holy Spirit to live within and among us, Jesus enables us to see and participate in God's new world.

That's why our series is called DECODER RING. Jesus enables us to discern what would otherwise be hidden to us.

We began on Easter with the Resurrection as the Eighth day, the first day of a new creation week. Then Sonya and Matt helped us see how Jesus invites us to see that he is the fulfillment of God's long plan for the flourishing of all peoples.

Next, we saw that Jesus invites us into his work in the here and now, not after we die, and how Jesus and the Spirit work with us even when we get into Good Trouble.

As we're nearing the end of the series - next week is Pentecost!, our scope is growing. Today, I want to look at God's vision for us as a church community.

What does it mean to be part of a church?

I think a lot of us have found our way to Catalyst because we've had experiences of church that tell us being part of a church is about conforming. We all have to believe the same way, act the same way, vote the same way.

We have to hang out with all the same people, hate all the same people.

But Catalyst has always been a church for folks that... uh... how do we put this delicately? For people that are a little weird.

(I mean look who you have as your pastor.)

If you're here, you probably already have a suspicion that this sort of uniformity *isn't* very good news.

And you'd be right.

Turn with us to [John 17](#).

Chapter 17 is the end of a lengthy section of John's Gospel we've been in for a couple of weeks now. It's all set during the Last Supper and John uses it as Jesus' sort of farewell address to his disciples. But now Jesus turns from his followers to God. A lot of scholars call this Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer" because Jesus is praying *for us*.

Let's work through this prayer together, and listen to what Jesus prays over us!

After saying all these things, Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you. For you have given him authority over everyone. He gives eternal life to each one you have given him. And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth. I brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began. -- John 17:1–5 (NLT)

In John's Gospel, any time Jesus speaks of his 'glory', he's talking about his crucifixion. 'Glory' is roughly equivalent to our contemporary notion of 'fame'. Several times, Jesus talks about when he's going to be 'raised into glory' - it's an intentional irony. We think of someone being celebrated for doing something amazing, but Jesus will be raised up on a cross as an object of scorn and ridicule.

Of course that's the point - what makes God famous, what makes God worthy of worship is precisely that God is the sort of God who would rather die than live without us. The one who would die for us, to rescue us, to liberate us.

Jesus is about to complete his work (it's why, right before he dies, he says, "It is finished").

So, now that Jesus has finished his work, what's next is about us:

"I have revealed you to the ones you gave me from this world. They were always yours. You gave them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they know that everything I have is a gift from you, for I have passed on to them the message you gave me. They accepted it and know that I came from you, and they believe you sent me. -- John 17:6–8 (NLT)

It's nearly impossible to overstate this point: Jesus shows us who God is. "I have revealed you to the ones you gave me."

I can't tell you the number of times I've been in a debate with someone about God's love and mercy when they say, "Well what about in the Old Testament when..."

And it's always some story that's a justification for their cruelty, bigotry or hatred.

So let's be very clear here: we don't read Jesus through the lens of the Bible. We read the Bible through the lens of Jesus. There are things the Bible says God said that don't align with who we know Jesus to be. There are things the Bible says God did that don't align with what Jesus does.

When there's conflict between Jesus and the rest of Scripture, we always look to Jesus. Why? Because he shows us who God is. He shows us what God's work is. This is not a tension to be managed or a balance to try to strike and it's not the OT God was a jerk and then took a Xanax.

Jesus is God. Full stop. And Jesus shows us who God is. Full stop.

Anything that doesn't look like Jesus isn't God.

Song

First, Jesus announces that he's finished the work God has for him - by going to the cross to die for us. Then, Jesus reminds us that he has shown us who God is, wholly and fully.

Now, Jesus knows he's about to leave so he prays for what lies ahead for his followers:

"My prayer is not for the world, but for those you have given me, because they belong to you. All who are mine belong to you, and you have given them to me, so they bring me glory. Now I am departing from the world; they are staying in this world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, you have given me your name; now protect them by the power of your name so that they will be united just as we are. -- John 17:9–11 (NLT)

Jesus prays we will all be united the way the Son and the Father are united. It's the oneness that is at the heart of creation, the oneness of the Trinity.

Now, the Trinity is one of those words that we find hard to understand - and rightfully so. Because it's less a term with a firm definition than one that stretches at the limits of our understanding.

When we talk about God as Trinity, we say that God is three persons - the Father, the Son and the Spirit, who are all one person. Not one person with three different roles - like I'm a pastor, a son and a husband.

And not three different people who all share one job, like a CEO, CFO and COO who all run heaven or something.

It's a paradox, three who are one. One who is three. It's something impossible at the heart of creation, and yet that something that we were created to be part of.

Jesus prays the Father would create a unity among us, a oneness that doesn't erase our distinctiveness.

You know the metaphors right? Less a melting pot than a chef's salad.

God created you distinct, with all your beautiful weird quirks and insights and perspectives.

And God created me distinct, with all my beautiful weird quirks and insights and perspectives.

Sameness isn't the goal. Unity is the goal.

Think back to that computer program - the goal is not code that's all a single letter repeated over and over. That doesn't actually make anything run. It's the coding equivalent of gibberish.

Good code is diverse. It's a symphony, not a solo.

So too is a good church. We're a whole potpourri of differences all coming together around one central pillar: Jesus himself, his life and work. The Holy Spirit brings us all together to be one church with one mission. Not erasing our differences, but becoming stronger because we are different together!

Communion + Examen

We all come to the same table together!

When in the last week have I felt connected to God and to my church?

When have I felt disconnected in the last week?

When in the next week might I experience disconnection from God or my church?

How is God calling me to pursue unity this week?

Assignment + Blessing

Take some time to celebrate someone else in the congregation this week.