

TRINITY SUNDAY ~ June 3, 2007

Proverbs 8: 1-4, 22-31; Psalm 8; Romans 5: 1-5; John 16: 12-15

Deep in the mystery of the being of God there is community. There is only one God. Yet there is relatedness within this one God. That capacity for relating, for loving in communion, within the one being, is extended to include us. Jesus prayed for us to have the same unity that is the unity of communion within the one God. He said “The father and I are one” – yet they are in relationship. That is the beginning of our understanding of the Holy Trinity – of communion within unity. A similar mutual relationship of the Father and the Son is expressed with the Holy Spirit, who is promised in the gospel reading today and elsewhere in Christ’s farewell to the disciples and in the final prayer of Jesus.

Today is Trinity Sunday – the day we celebrate the unique three in one nature of our God – God as Parent, Child, and Holy Spirit – Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. You may be sitting in your seats anxiously awaiting an explanation of this challenging doctrine of our church. Perhaps you are expecting me to address the question that followers of other faith traditions often pose – how can we call ourselves monotheistic, believing in one God only, when we have this concept of Trinity? Do we believe in one God or three, they wonder?

Whole courses in seminary, several books, more essays, are devoted solely to the topic of Trinity. How can we describe a God who is one and three at the same time? Do we believe that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are the same thing? Or that God our Creator is the same as Jesus Christ? Is that what the Trinity means?

Another understanding of Trinity is that the revelation of God to the Jewish people as loving Creator, of God in Christ Jesus as loving Saviour, of God as Holy Spirit who personally inspires us day by day. All our language about God is appallingly inadequate, but Christians have clung on tenaciously to the doctrine of the Trinity as a way of preserving the tiny truths that God has revealed to us. Maybe our formula of the Trinity is a mere glimpse of the truth about God, but it is a critical glimpse – one that makes all the difference.

Trinitarian theology offers a profoundly relational and communal understanding of God as well as of life created and redeemed by God – God as self-expending, other-affirming, community-building love – God in terms of shared life and love. The Trinity also expresses the thoroughness, the pervasiveness, with which God wants to be part of our lives. Not just as our Maker, God wants to be with us in human form – and not just as a human incarnation, God wants to be within us as our very breath. Don’t get mired in defense of the doctrine – enter into the spirit of Trinity.

We always struggle when we try to express the mystery of God in human terms. God as Creator and Parent – God the Father – only Jesus of Nazareth would dare to come up with such a way of understanding our God. He brings the Aramaic word “Abba” into the centre – not a patriarchal, kingly head of the Hebrew people – “Abba” is best translated “dad”, “pop”, or “da.” This is the tender, forgiving, welcoming, persona; the one that comes down to the small child’s level and sits on the floor; the one who plays games, tells stories, and picks the child up and carries him or her on shoulders. Abba is the extravagant parent of the prodigal son, who throws dignity to the wind and runs to meet and hug the young fool on his return home from the pig pens.

When we come to the Son, there are still some hurdles. With Jesus we have a real human being with a real story. Here is not a religious concept but an unforgettable life. Jesus is a human being in whom God dwelt without reserve. Look on Jesus in action and you see God at work. Here is a God who can laugh and cry, thirst and suffer. Here are tears rolling down the cheeks of the one, unique visible expression of God.

God the Son is not an outsider who redemptively drops us a lifeline from above, but is one of us in the hazards of human existence. The human race is being saved from the inside. God in Christ is the Divine insider. And at the end, the Son gives himself absolutely on the cross so that through his love-victory, we might through his saving grace know the Father in the fellowship of the Spirit.

Just as inadequate as Father and Son is the word “Spirit”. It is a slippery concept with which to think about God. Yet there seems no better word in our language through which we can describe the God who is invisibly and intimately here now and always. When we say Spirit we remove all barriers to contact between divine and human. By the power of the spirit we can meet and have fellowship. God unseen, untouchable, uncontrollable, yet nearer to us than any thing or any other person can ever be.

In the Bible, the word Spirit is used to describe God’s personal presence in this world – God’s very breath – creating things and creatures, and recreating that which has fallen into degeneration. The Spirit is that fire in the belly which made prophets discontented with the injustices of society and led them to speak the hard truth to people who did not want to hear. The Spirit is the holy witness that endorsed Jesus at his baptism and sent him on his mission to preach, teach and heal. The Spirit is the divine intimacy that empowered the church at Pentecost – empowered us again in our celebration of Pentecost last Sunday. The Spirit personally makes it possible for you and I to have faith.

If this imagery of Father, Son and Holy Spirit sounds too masculine to be true of God, notice the feminine character of Wisdom as she introduced herself in the Old Testament lesson [paraphrase]:

*God created me at the very outset,
I have been with God from the dawn.
I was fashioned even before the world was formed.
When there were no depths, I was born.
When there were no springs abounding with water,
Before the mountains or hills had been piled up, I was born.
When God had not yet made the earth or the fields or even formed the soil,
When God separated God’s reality from the reality of humanity, I was there.
When God separated the sky from the ocean and the ocean from the land,
Then I was beside God like an eager child.
I was a source of joy to God because of my exultation of creation,
I celebrated God’s creation and rejoiced in humanity.*

We hear the voice of Wisdom calling to all those living – to hear her voice and live. Wisdom calls us – God calls us – the Spirit calls us – Christ calls us – and today in a public manner, in a holy and sacred manner, we celebrate as a community of faith the answering of that call.

The one who is calling to us is personified wisdom, creation’s first street preacher, noisily proclaiming her message to anyone who will listen. She is a prophet, crying aloud in the market, on the street corners and at the city gates with a message of reproach, punishment and promise. Wisdom is a smart,

justice-driven, passionate figure who wants nothing less than that everyone should follow in her playful, determined footsteps as she seeks to both transform and delight in the created world.

Wisdom is that creative energy of God – continually inviting us to abundant life – calling us to celebrate a relational awareness of our God who seeks to be woven into all of our being – imbedded and enveloping. This is the understanding that Trinity allows: God to whom we come, through whom we come, and by whom we come to celebrate the love of God, the mercy and forgiveness of God, the healing power of God.

Wisdom is meant to represent a right relationship with God – a relationship in harmony with the created order – a relationship that recognizes the power and authority of God – a relationship that values the mutual joy of the participants. *Wisdom* is a promise of the right relationship with God that is possible through God's creative power.

There we have it: We have been shown the gentle guidance of God the Father, the intimacy of God the Spirit, and the costly grace of God the Son – one God yet a community of persons revealed in the creation messages of Genesis, Proverbs, Psalms and Gospel. The Trinitarian formula insists that the nature of God is closer to a loving community than to a lofty individuality. The highest form of existence, of personal being, is communal – God is communal.

If this is the God we worship, then true greatness lies in the direction of community rather than in self-sufficient individuality. We will find the true meaning of being a person in relationship with others. The community of faith reflects God far better than a lone minister or elder; no matter how gifted that person may happen to be. Individualism is the way of limitation, diminishment, and death. Growth takes place when we give to others and receive from others; when we know we need them and they need us.

WE BELIEVE

**We who are members of the household of faith declare:
The Lord our God is One, and we shall love the Lord our God
with all our heart, and mind, and soul and strength**

**This is the One who has patiently and lovingly created us, nurtured us, and who prepares
a future for us beyond all imagining.**

**This is the One who amazingly and lovingly came to our aid in Christ Jesus, who teaches us
a brighter way, and by the grace of the cross, delivers us from evil.**

**This is the One who intimately and lovingly is among us in Spirit, creating the community
of the church and inspiring us to deeds of justice and mercy.**

**In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
we who are members of the household of faith declare:
The Lord our God is One, and we shall love the Lord our God
with all our heart, and mind, and soul and strength.**