

“A Mystery Still Unfolding”

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?

On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:

“To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live.
The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.

Ages ago I was set up, at the first,
before the beginning of the earth.

When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills,
I was brought forth — when God had not yet made
earth and fields, or the world’s first bits of soil.

When God established the heavens, I was there,
when God drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when God made firm the skies above,
when God established the fountains of the deep,
when God assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress God’s command,
when God marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside God, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before God always,
rejoicing in God inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.

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Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

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I.

Today is Trinity Sunday the first Sunday after Pentecost in the Western Christian liturgical calendar, celebrating the Christian doctrine which understands the one God, who is one in Substance, to be expressed or experienced as 3 Persons: the Father who creates, the Son who redeems, and the Holy Spirit which sustains. This is a heady subject, to be sure. The Doctrine of the Trinity is understood, on one hand, to be a mystery in that it can neither be known by unaided human reason apart from revelation, nor effectively demonstrated by reason after it has been revealed. On the other hand, it is maintained that though the mystery is *beyond* reason, it is not *contrary* to it, for it is not incompatible with the principles of rational thought.

II.

The first historical mention of the Trinity, in a strictly theological sense, dates to 180 C.E. employed by a fellow named of Theophilus of Antioch. The concept of the Trinity is a human construct, as the word “trinity” cannot be found within the scriptural canon. It is our way of understanding a cosmic mystery which is, quite frankly, too big for our brains. It does, though, have a solid basis in Scripture, where we see the nascent concept emerging in the later gospels, both of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, and 1st Peter. In each instance, there is a strong emphasis on an equality of substance; that the three persons are the same in, and equal to, each other. This is important to realize, because later controversies and heresies all sprung from the desire to make one or two of the persons subordinate to the third, usually God.

III.

Compared to the very many other elements of Christianity, the doctrine of the Trinity is really *the* thing which defines us and sets us apart as a faith. Certainly, it asserts the role of Christ, as God incarnate, to more than just a prophet or miracle worker; not just the son of God, but God Himself/Herself/Itself. Further, the Doctrine of the Trinity, rather uniquely, also asserts the *imminent* aspect (vs. transcendent) of the God who is *with us* in the form of

the Holy Spirit, or in the Greek, the Paraclete; not just a divine emissary or representative, but the actual presence of God, here with us in our lives. Frankly, these are both pretty cool ideas, and they have arisen rather artfully over the course of two millennia, in ways are still unfolding; and today we're going to unfold them just a little bit more.

IV.

Let turn our attention, now, to the sermon text for today from Proverbs 8, which is nothing short of remarkable. Here, in the inspired word of God, we find record of some divine entity, or sacred force called "Wisdom." Now, for centuries, the Christian church has been trying to roll Wisdom in with Christ or the Holy Spirit. In I Corinthians 1:24 Paul calls Christ "the Wisdom of God." While in I Corinthians 12:8 Paul calls Wisdom one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Though I wouldn't argue that these notions are in anyway wrong, I would say that this is the easy way out of the struggle to understand the place of Wisdom with respect to our Trinitarian notion of God. Frankly, it doesn't sit quite right with me, not totally anyway.

V.

Just look at the text, verse 22: "the Lord created me at the beginning, the first of God's acts, long ago." Clearly, this puts wisdom outside the confines of our notion of the Trinity, which sees the three as one substance, and not in anyway derivative, or created by one or both of the others. However, Wisdom isn't just one aspect of Christ or the Holy Spirit. It is, somehow, different than these, and if not these, then its own thing.

Moving on in the text, we find that Wisdom was "brought forth" before the mountains, and before earth and fields were created; the first of God's acts. Moreover, Wisdom was a creative force of God, perhaps *the* creative force; like a master worker, present with God we are told, when the foundations of the earth were laid. And finally, almost incidentally and casually, Wisdom is expressed using the third person personal pronoun "she." "*Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?*"

VI.

Personally I find this a very provocative and exciting idea: a feminine, creative force at work with God, or in God, to birth the world. Obviously, for

some this might be a rather perplexing, if not threatening, notion. But remember, what we are trying to do here in the church in broad strokes, and on Trinity Sunday in particular, is understand God more *fully*. To use our reason and our experience to make sense of God's revelation to us; both the special revelation of Scripture, like what we find in Proverbs 8, and the general revelation of God we find in our experience of the Creation.

VII.

Now, this idea of Wisdom as a creative force and a divine associate, leads us to consider and remember two things. First, there is always more going on with God than we can possibly imagine. God is a mystery, who can neither be known by unaided human reason apart from revelation, nor effectively demonstrated by reason after God reveals Godself. Second, though God, as a mystery, is *beyond* reason, God is not *contrary* to it, for God is not incompatible with the principles of rational thought or our experience of the world.

I'm certainly not trying to make a case for augmenting our concept of the Trinity to include a feminine office, but where does wisdom fit in? Is it really so outside the box to imagine *some* feminine aspect of God? The idea is not only scriptural, as we see evidenced in Proverbs 8, the idea also *resonates* with our experience of creation.

VIII.

I'm not sure if any of you have noticed, but of late your pastor has been a bit fascinated (or preoccupied) with the passing of time, and what this means to us, as a congregation, and to me, as an individual. At the heart of it, I'm sure, are all the same reasons we seldom give much thought to one's family tree while in our 20s and 30s, but when we hit middle age and begin to face the idea of where all this heading, where we have come from suddenly looms larger in importance.

This certainly helps to explain some of my recent fascination with the passing of time. However, another part of it, the more important part I would argue, has to do with the accumulation of life experiences, the deepening of relationships over time, the wisdom which comes as a gift from each, and humility which is required to unwrap and enjoy such a gift.

IX.

Last Sunday after worship, Michelle Theisen pulled me aside and told me that the question I had posed during my sermon the week before, whether it was easier to know or be known, had been heavy on her mind; plaguing her, really. Though she was very much tongue-in-cheek in complaining about such a burden bestowed, she was thankful that I had made her think, and appreciated my role in, similarly, causing the congregation to think about their faith. Ironically, or perhaps more an example of turn-about being fair play, Michelle's comments caused me to revisit the question and, given today's scripture passage, to consider faith not from the perspective of "thinking," but, rather, from a perspective of "feeling."

X.

While it is true we should always aspire to a "reasoned faith" (and this is something Presbyterians, in general, do very well and something at which we as a congregation, in particular, excel) reason has its limits; as earlier noted. More and more as time passes, and *my* time in particular, I'm left with the sense that two millennia of thinking about, and reasoning out our faith has really been an grand exercise in "Mansplaining"; with the concept of the Trinity being a prime example.

With the baby enjoying this bathwater just fine, there is no reason to throw out either of them. However, and to really stretch the metaphor, it may be time to splash in some bubbles and, perhaps, add a few essential oils and florals scents. That is to say, let us press on with a reasoned faith, but let us also endeavor to have such a faith be *wise* as well. A wise faith is one that is both humanly creative and co-creative with the Divine; a faith in which the world, and God, might delight.

XI.

Today, Trinity Sunday, is an occasion given over to the notion of a Triune God: Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. However, we must always remember, especially on a day such as this, that God is always more than we could ever realize, and that if, in the passing of time, we allow a wise faith to flourish within us we can, and will, come to both know more and feel more of who and what God is and, correspondingly, of who and what we might yet become.

God is a mystery still unfolding just as we, and the lives we lead, are a mystery that is still unfolding as well. I hope that today's sermon will made you think. More importantly, I hope today's sermon will help you to feel. Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? Amen.