

Trinity Sunday: Shall We Dance?  
An Invitation to the Circle Dance of Perichoresis  
Proverb 8: 1-4, 22-31; Psalm 8; John 16: 12-15

Last Sunday on Pentecost, we listened to the story of how God created many languages in the world, and how the Holy Spirit came to the followers of Jesus and gave them the ability to speak in other languages when they were talking about the mighty works of God, so that everyone could understand them.

We also reflected on the limits of human languages, as rich as they are; how the words fail us sometimes; how some experiences are just too wonderful or too sad or simply beyond what words can express. And how this is true about our God.

But the early Church Fathers, the ancient theologians who established intellectual and doctrinal foundations of Christianity, tried to do exactly that, to describe this unfathomable, incomprehensible God, and came up with the Doctrine of Trinity: a triune God who is three-in-one and one-in-three as the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

Now the doctrine of Trinity is considered as one of the most difficult concepts to understand, and before you mentally check out on me, I want to assure you, I am not about to lecture you on this doctrine, or the historical background of its formation. I suspect more than a few of you are quite turned off by religious doctrines, and for those of you who are curious, we can have a study group, for it is rich and fascinating.

But let's not throw away the baby with the bathwater, because those experiences in our lives that are beyond words are often the deepest and most moving, like our relationship with God. And somehow the concept of Trinity helps us express it, even though it is not found as a developed doctrine in the Bible. We only have brief glimpses of a Trinitarian formulation, as in the end of Matthew, where the disciples are told to go out and baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But a closer reading of the biblical text would show

that understanding the triune God is not mere intellectual exercise, but at its core, it is about our relationship with God.

Today is Trinity Sunday, the first Sunday after Pentecost. On this day in the Christian year, we celebrate this beyond-words-ness of God and our faith in this holy mystery. Rather than analyzing the doctrine or revisit the age-old debate on the exact nature of the triune God, let us turn to the Bible. The passages from the Hebrew scriptures of Proverbs 8, which Barbara read to us, and Psalm 8 and the Gospel of John together give us a vivid and yet fluid picture of the triune God. Where the logic and rationality meet their limit, images take over.

In Proverbs 8, we are introduced to this female figure called Wisdom, Chokhma in Hebrew. Who is this? She raises her voice of understanding, rather she IS the understanding, the intelligence itself, and she is calling out to all who live, wherever humans gather, where people are coming and going. Atop the heights, along the path, at the crossroads and by the gate before the city, at the entrance, she shouts. We can almost see her with arms outstretched, yearning to get their attention, and our attention.

We learn that this Wisdom WAS with God in the beginning before the world was formed. She was there at the beginning, right by God's side, as God fashioned the heaven and the earth and all therein. She was God's creative guide, the intelligence, and the design behind all creation, setting boundaries and order for the created world.

These images evoke another scene from the Scriptures. "In the beginning when God created the heaven and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters." Genesis 1, verses 1-2. The "wind from God" here is "ruach," the spirit and the breath of God, and it is also feminine. The Haggia Sophia, the Holy Wisdom in Greek, is also the Holy Spirit. Proverbs 8 shows us a picture of Lady Wisdom, the Holy Spirit.

But wait, doesn't this creation image remind you of another Bible passage? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being

through him and without him not one thing came into being.” The first 3 verses of the Gospel of John, Chapter 1. Here, John presents the Word, the masculine Logos, who is Christ, Son of God, who in the beginning was with God and who was God. Somehow, the Wisdom who is the Holy Spirit is also the Word of God, the Christ.

In today’s passage from the Gospel of John, Jesus is talking to his disciples, preparing them for his departure from the earth and for their unknown future. Jesus says he still have many things to tell them, but he can’t tell them, because this was along as he could walk with them as God’s Incarnate Word, God in flesh, here on earth. The disciples would live on... as we do, without Jesus by our side.

So, Jesus promises to them, and by extension to us, that we will not face the future alone, but the Spirit of Truth, the Paraclete will come to us. And when “he” does, he the Spirit of Truth, the Paraclete, will take what is Jesus’s and declare it to us. At the same time Jesus says “all that Father has” is Jesus’s. The Father gives everything to Jesus, and the Spirit takes or receives what is Jesus’s and declares it to the community, holding back nothing. There is this mutual giving and receiving among the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit that defines their relationship.

Through these and other Scripture passage, we gain a picture not of God who is a static being, but of this gender-fluid, nonbinary, intra-personal God in whom the life-giving, creative energy, is always flowing, setting them in motion, as if in a dance. Perichoresis, is a Greek word for “going around” and has been used to describe the relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Trinity is not just the sum of the Three Persons, but it is the Dance their mutual motion creates.

Arian controversy erupted when Arian asserted, because Proverbs 8 says “Wisdom, understood as Christ, was created,” Christ was not God. The orthodox party interpreted the same Hebrew word not as “created” but as “possessed,” and hence God possessed Wisdom, identifying God and Wisdom, and Arian was

accused of heresy; they got stuck with analogy and the words. The triune God obviously cannot be bound by human language.

A 12th century Benedictine monk, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, offers another interesting imagery for the Trinity, in his sermon on the Song of Songs in the Hebrew Scripture. He says, “If the father is he who kisses, the Son is he who is kissed, then it cannot be wrong to see in the kiss the Holy Spirit.”

Okay, these images of the Trinity might be nice, but why do we care? Whether in a complicated word game of the Creed or more imaginative pictures, what does Trinity have to do with us?

Let’s go back to the passage from Proverbs 8. It started with a picture of Lady Wisdom straining her to reach out to humanity, to all that live. Why? The concluding part of the passage says Lady Wisdom delighted in humanity. We the human beings are the crown of God’s creation who brings joy to Wisdom. Wisdom, as the intelligence behind God’s good creation, sets the order, the necessary limits, and the norm for human activity. There’s the law of nature, the way of God, that govern our human activities that is always for our own good and for the good of the world.

It’s interesting that, in Judaism, this female personification of Wisdom became elaborated as the Torah, the Law of God that is the Gift from God, whereas Christianity recognizes in Wisdom the Word of God, the Christ, just as Pentecost in the Jewish tradition celebrates the receiving of the Law, while Pentecost in Christianity celebrates the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Either way, Wisdom sets her eyes on humanity, and longs for us to acquire understanding.

If Proverbs 8 is Wisdom calling to all that live, today’s Psalm, Psalm 8 is a human voice in response to that call. Psalm 8 is unique in that it addresses God directly in the second person throughout. The human voice acknowledges God’s reign beyond the earth, beyond what is known to the human mind.

This awesome God is the God who chooses to be in relationship with humanity. This God entrusts us with the care of God’s creation. Through Wisdom, God teaches us the way of God, the boundaries, and the order, so we know how to care for the whole creation. “God made us little lower than God,”

but we are nothing apart from this relationship with God, through Wisdom, through the Word of God. God has “put all things under our feet.” We have a charge, to care for God’s creation. As God possesses Wisdom and creates and sustains the world, we who are little less than God are called to be God’s partner in caring for this world.

Between Proverbs 8 and Psalm 8, there is this mutual adoration between God and humanity. If the Trinity is a dance, this triune God invites us to join in the dance, learning the way of God, acquiring Wisdom by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the sake of God’s creation.

If God is the Kisser and the Christ is the Kissed, and the Holy Spirit is the Kiss itself, the triune God is blowing kisses to us. The Divine Kiss will empower us to follow Jesus, guided by the Spirit.

God’s invitation is ever before us to join this Divine Dance, taking God’s hands and learning the steps. What is ours to do as the human beings created little lower than God. As individuals and as a congregation, placed in this place, at this time. As we look at the world around us, where do we see the need for our care? What is hurting? Who needs healing?

The wound of this world is all too easy to see these days and all too overwhelming. But, if we join the Dance, the triune God of wisdom and power will show us what is ours to do.

So, Shall We Dance?

In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen