

## The Church of the Good Shepherd

The Rev. Christine Love Mendoza

Trinity Sunday – June 16, 2019

Proverbs 8 :1-4, 22-31

Today is Trinity Sunday – the day in the church year on which we celebrate (or, rather, struggle with) the theological doctrine that presents God as one unity in three persons. As I joked last year, this is the least loved Sunday to preach. Often it is called “Seminarian Sunday” or “Curate Sunday” as it is usually relegated to whomever has the least say in the preaching schedule. For some reason I have been stuck with preaching Trinity Sunday for the past six years!

The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the more curious and confounding theological foundations of our faith. Curious because there is no specific scriptural warrant for it – one can’t easily point to one or another particular scripture that directly supports it. Confounding because it seems to defy easy logic. The doctrine of the Trinity describes God as one God in three Divine Persons. The three persons are distinct, yet are one “substance, essence or nature.” Three persons, one unity – with each person as distinct while also fully God.

Most often, we identify this triune nature of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but over the millennia, we have used many naming constructs to represent this communion, like the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer; the Lover, the Beloved, and the Love that flows between them; just to name a couple. Most importantly, however, the doctrine of the Trinity is also a way of saying something about God and the way God is within Godself. It recognizes that the essential nature of God is one of being in loving relationship – in communion. The deepest truth about God is God in relationship within Godself.

Frederick Buechner writes that, “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit mean that the mystery beyond us, the mystery among us, and the mystery within us are all the same mystery. Thus the Trinity is a way of saying something about us and the way we experience God.” In the end, the only way we have of comprehending the nature of God within Godself is through the way we experience God. And our primary *experience* of God in the midst of our ordinary lives is through the encounter of God’s Holy Spirit.

Sometimes, the Person of the Holy Spirit gets lost in our reflections upon the Trinity. Too often we focus our attention on the Father and the Son in such a way as to leave us fuzzy on the work of the Holy Spirit. That is often the case because the Spirit is more like action than person – more like an activating agent rather than a distinct personality with which one engages– more like a verb than a noun. We can study scripture to learn about the God the Father and God the Son. We can study the natural world around us and wonder at what this says about the Creator. We can ponder about the nature of God and debate the philosophical and theological arguments. But we can only *experience* God the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not one to speak, rather is one who moves – moves us to action; moves us to feeling; moves us to become. Is there any wonder that the image most often employed to describe the person of the Holy Spirit is that of wind? The very first sentence of our holy scriptures speaks of this creative movement of the Holy Spirit: “In the beginning when God created the heavens 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.”

In the early 2000’s, there was a book called *The Shack* that made quite a bit of noise among Christians. This self-published novel by a then-obscure Canadian author William P. Young sold over 10 million copies. Perhaps even some of you have read it. The plot centered around a man who, in a deep depression at the abduction and presumed murder of his daughter, is drawn to a shack in the forest, in which he encounters the manifestations of the three persons of the Trinity.

It was the author's depictions of the Trinity that made such a stir. In this novel, God the Father takes the form of a gregarious and full-figured African American woman who calls herself Papa. God the Son is represented by a Middle Eastern carpenter named Jesus (which shouldn't have been much of a surprise to anyone). And God the Holy Spirit physically manifests as an Asian woman, the exact nature of whose role and even her specific characteristics were intentionally mysterious.

Given our culture's history with race, sex, and gender issues, it is no wonder that this depiction caused such debate. On the whole, I thought the book was thought-provoking and ambitious in its attempt to shake up stale theological perceptions, but that text itself was not particularly well-written. What I did find interesting was Young's depiction of the Holy Spirit. While manifested as a human woman, she was shimmering and always in motion and she had an almost transparent cast to her body that made her slightly difficult to look at and focus on clearly. It is hard to imagine a personification of this nature of the Holy Spirit – that of movement; this activating agent – and this might have been as good an attempt as any, I suppose.

Our first lesson this morning from the Book of Proverbs also provides a construct for this third person of the Trinity – that of God's Holy Wisdom. In this eighth chapter of Proverbs, we are presented with the fascinating image of Lady Wisdom standing in the midst of life and hollering her invitation for us to come to her. Wisdom cries out "on the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads...beside the gates...at the entrance of the portals" – she seems to appear everywhere we might be, beckoning us to listen, to join her. And her call is to *everyone*...all of humanity, "To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live."

In our lesson, Wisdom tells us of her age and constancy: "The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago." In verse 24, she elaborates, "When there were no depths I was brought forth." The Hebrew verb for "brought forth" may also be translated as "whirl, dance, or writhe." So, from the very beginning of time, Wisdom danced with the Father in the great work of creation. She cries, "when he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, ...when we marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker."

And Wisdom was no mere construction laborer – no mere tool employed by the Creator. Beautifully, she claims, "and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race." Wisdom was God's delightful companion and partner, and together they rejoiced in their work. God created not merely for his entertainment but rather out of love, to be loved and delighted in – for God's and creation's mutual joy.

The reality of God is a holy trinity of persons, who separately possess distinction of purpose, yet together comprise a unity of nature, substance, and will. Our God not only desires communion and relationship, but also *is* communion and relationship within God's very self. The most expressive image of God may be that of the divine dance – a wild, whirling, dance of joy and exchange of love that itself is the energy of creation.

In the Eastern church, there is an early Christian image of the Trinity as *perichoresis*, a circle dance. This image represents the unending flow of giving and receiving of generative love between Father, Son, and Spirit as the joyful pattern of reality. In this image, God is not only a dancer but the Dance itself. From this holy dance the creation of all that is, seen and unseen, is produced. What's more, we're all invited to participate in the dance of New Creation. Expounding on this image, Richard Rohr writes: "Trinity is the very nature of God, and this God is a circle dance, a centrifugal force flowing outward, and then drawing all things into the dance centripetally."

This image of God's holy dance is important also, because our God and our faith is one of *participation and communion*. We are called not to merely give our assent to the concept of God – not merely to confess our faith – rather to *participate* in God's work of reconciliation and renewal of

creation. We are not created merely to observe God's holy dance but to join it – whirling and dancing with the God whose very nature is the dance of love.

This week, I invite you to listen for Wisdom's call to you. From the crossroads and street corners, within the halls of our workplaces and from the aisles of our grocery stores, God's Holy Wisdom is speaking to us. She beckons us to come to her and join her in her holy dance of love and communion. Our broken and disconnected world may dance on the precipice of widespread unrest and violence, but Wisdom calls us to another dance – a dance of reconciliation, redemption, and re-creation. The divine dance of love, within which we, too, may daily be God's delight, rejoicing before him always.

Amen.