

“As the Spirit Moves”

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First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood**

**Sunday, May 22, 2016
Trinity Sunday**

Readings from Scripture: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31 and John 16:7, 12-15

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 hill, I was brought forth--when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil. 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 he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Jesus says, “Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, the Spirit will guide you into all the truth; for the Spirit will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and will declare to you the things that are to come. The Spirit will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

John 16:7, 12-15

Will you pray with me? Gracious and holy God, you offer us the living word to nourish and challenge us. Today may we reflect upon it together, each as individuals and as part of a community. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Just a few weeks ago we experienced the joy of Easter. Last week on Pentecost, known as the birthday of the church, we worshipped and we celebrated the burning of the mortgages. Today is Trinity Sunday. When I read some of the preaching commentaries about the doctrine of the Trinity, you will know why I feel like I got the short stick on the lectionary lottery. One commentator wrote *Dear Working Preacher, I'll be honest: I find Trinity Sunday among the most difficult to preach. As I've said before, I don't claim to fully understand the Trinity and I don't trust those who think they do. The Trinity is, at heart, our best if manifestly inadequate attempt to capture in words the mysterious nature of God. It has something to say about both the unity and the diversity of God and God's work, and about the importance of community to God and all those whom God has created and loved.*¹

So Trinity Sunday, then, is not about an event but a concept, the doctrine about God being three in one--Father/Creator, Son and Holy Spirit. Each of the passages this morning attempts to describe what is indescribable about God. Yet in the midst of all what is hard to comprehend, we become more aware of what it points to: that the members of the Trinity while distinct, are in relationship with one another. And so it is a reminder to us also that we are called to be in relationship with God and with one another. The call to worship this day was based on Psalm 8 from the lectionary, describing the Lord of all creation--the One who created heaven and earth and the beasts of the field, the fish of the sea and us mortals. God gave dominion, it says, over the earth putting in relationship with one another, animals and all of creation. In the Gospel of John, Jesus talks to the disciples about the fact that he is going to die, but also promises them they will not be left alone because the Holy Spirit will come.

Then there is the Proverbs reading that David read this morning--a poetic description of the one called Lady Wisdom. *"The Lord created me at the beginning. I was daily God's delight rejoicing in this inhabited world and delighting in the human race."* Lady Spirit was there before time but also delights and rejoices in the inhabited world and the human race.

Clear as mud, right? Paul's words, *we see in the mirror dimly*, seem to fit well here. These words that we have read are only an attempt to describe God who exists within time, but also before and beyond time. The holy One who is far off and yet very near. The mysterious and the divine among us and yet beyond us. In a world where we focus on facts and figures, this kind of conversation presents a conundrum and sometimes it's hard to fathom and accept. Indeed, in some ways it echoes the very words that Jesus is quoted as saying this morning, about hearing things that at the time we cannot fully bear or understand or know. Now I will agree it does feel a bit odd to go back, in the weeks after Easter, to an event that took place before Jesus died. The passage, itself, is from four chapters called the "Farewell Discourses", the words that Jesus shared at the last supper before his arrest. It's as if he is like the matriarch or patriarch gathering the family together in an attempt to get them ready for what's going to happen after he's gone.

Clearly it was a very difficult conversation for all of them. First of all, because I think Jesus did not want to die. I think he loved life here on earth, teaching and laughing and breaking bread. Yes, he got frustrated with the disciples at times, but he loved them. He found meaning in sharing words of hope and healing with so many people. So sensing what was going to come could not have been easy for him. No doubt, the news came as a shock to the disciples as well. It's not hard to understand why that would be. That kind of news is hard for us to absorb. We get upset. We ask questions and we wrestle with it. And so did they. For them it must have been a real challenge. Jesus had brought them all together and now he was going to leave? I think some of them had envisioned a very different Messiah, one who would lead them to a mighty victory. This news, now, was distressing and no doubt, they wondered, what's going to happen to us? What's going to happen to me? What now?

Jesus senses at this point that he can only go so far. He says there are things you cannot bear yet. In Greek the word is Bas-tay-zin...to bear or to carry a burden. You can't get it or comprehend it yet, is what he seems to say. At first that may sound condescending, but I don't think that's the point. He's not saying you're not smart enough or faithful enough. He is saying I don't know if you're ready yet to understand what I mean until after I'm gone. After I'm gone, what I'm telling you now will make more sense. But in the midst of all this he says, *fear not, for you will not be alone. The Spirit will be with you to guide you and lead you into the future, even if it doesn't seem possible now.*

I think there is incredible wisdom in that passage. Jesus knows that sometimes the disciples and we must experience something before we can sense how to deal with it. Not long ago Christa Tippet was in town. She is the NPR radio host, and she was here to talk about her new book about her own faith journey and the people she has talked with about faith along the way. Someone asked her something along this line, *Where do you*

think your faith journey will lead you? Where do you think you are going? What do you think you'll be thinking a year from now? And she said, "I don't really think I can answer that. I will have to live into it, and then I will know."

Indeed, we can't fully prepare for some things in life. We cannot prepare for our feelings at the moment of the death of someone we love, or how we'll feel when a child goes away to college, or when we move to a new town and don't know anyone. But we can find comfort in the promises of our faith. Jesus offered words of hope and encouragement because he knew it would not be easy, and he knew that the disciples were human. And he knew that where there is a vacuum, power will try to find a way in. He knew they would wonder, *Who's in charge now? What do we do?* And so he assures them that while he is no longer with them, if they open their hearts and their minds to the presence and the movement of the Holy Spirit, that Spirit would bind them together and show them the way. And they would be reminded that they will not go this journey alone.

Such things are offered to us as well--the reminder of the Spirit moving in and among us. When we are baptized in the name of the Trinity, we are called into a new relationship with God and with one another. We remain distinct individuals, yet we become part of one body, the body of Christ. On Trinity Sunday, we are reminded that we are not alone, that God in the Spirit is always with us. That the Spirit moves among us offering wisdom, truth and peace.

That came to me in a powerful way this week as I prepared for the memorial service for Martha Norvell. Martha was always a warm and gracious, kind person. As I talked with her family last week, I learned she had faced many challenges growing up. She grew up during the depression and it had affected her family deeply. She lost her husband when he was 49, and suddenly had to provide for four children. And then later one of her sons died at a young age. But as I listened to their stories, I sensed how Martha shared her love and wisdom with them. Her granddaughter said that when she was young, they often watched "Winnie the Pooh's Grand Adventure" together. Now I never thought I'd quote Winnie the Pooh in a sermon, but I'm going to do that today. I was curious and I went on the internet and found the scene she was talking about. In the movie, Christopher Robin is sitting in a tree talking with Pooh and says, "Pooh, if there is ever a time when we are not together, I want you to remember these things: that you are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think." Pooh doesn't take Christopher's words very seriously at first, but we get the sense that Christopher knows change is coming. And so he ends their conversation by saying, "Pooh, remember I will always be with you when we are apart. I will always be with you."

I think that, in part, is what Jesus is trying to tell those he loved--that they will not be left alone, that he will be with them because of the Spirit. When the time comes, if they open their hearts and place their trust in the Spirit, they will come to know that they are smarter and braver and stronger than they think. They will always be bound together by and through the Spirit. And so it is for us, too. Life presents its challenges. Unexpected things happen. Change flows through our lives even when we don't expect it or want it, and we may feel anxious and afraid. But into those moments of change and struggle, we are reminded that we are not alone. In such moments we may be able to move beyond fear because of the promises of the one who is with us through all the storms of our lives. The Spirit moves among us with love and peace to sustain us on the journey of life. May we trust in the Triune God present with us and among us in the gift of the Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

1) Quote from David Lose, from Hope in the Meantime on Dear Working Preacher from Tuesday, May 21, 2013 7:56 PM as found on Textweek.com.