

The Holy Trinity
26 May 2013

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

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

It's okay to be stumped. It's okay to admit that you don't know everything.

In the year 2000, when my daughter Bethany was three years old, our family was at the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago, sitting in seats in the amphitheatre waiting for the dolphin show. There was a warm-up act of an MC who was inviting children to come up front. Bethany said, "Dad, if they invite me up, will you come with me?" I said, "sure, honey," and patted her on the head. The very next second as she raised her hand, Bethany was invited to come on down (I came along)! She was introduced to the crowd, "Bethany, from Nashua, New Hampshire!" First question: "What do dolphins eat?" Bethany puzzled through it, then declared, "Fish!" "Correct!" The crowd cheered. Question #2: "At the Shedd Aquarium Oceanarium, we feature the Pacific White-Sided Dolphin. Bethany, what are the 35 remaining species of dolphin?" Bethany squinched up her nose and furrowed her brow, leaned into the microphone, and declared, "I don't know!" which was the absolute truth.

How can you contain God? How can you without mistake, clearly and intelligently elucidate God, as one-yet-three? Kathleen Norris leads off her consideration of this feast day's doctrine by saying
"Trinity" has always seemed a word more strange than scary, although it has generated some of the most abstruse, mind-boggling writing in all of Christian theology. (from *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*, New York: Riverhead Books © 1998).

I feel like singing this chestnut:
Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,

*Most blessèd, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, Thy great Name we praise.*

Today we praise God, unknowable, ineffable, awesome, transcendent, mysterious, taking a stab in the dark like the wise and well-meaning fathers and mothers of the ancient church as they pounded out the language of the Nicene Creed first in 325 A.D., then wordsmithing it some more in Constantinople in 381 A.D. Like many church meetings, those in attendance wanted to make a statement on the one hand and attempt to quell conflict on the other hand by saying this is what it really means, also and unfortunately adding that anyone who disagrees can take a hike.

Doesn't head-scratching about the divinity breaks open the revelation of God? Can't a sense of mystery speak to us who deep inside, despite our puffed chests of certitude, really wonder, and like Bethany squinch our noses and furrow our brows, and declare this about the Trinity: "I don't know!"

Hear me out. *I don't know* is different than *I don't care*. It is an antidote to those who declare that I know all there is to know, so let's cut off anymore insight shed on the subject. While we do not know all there is to know, on a day like today we declare that there is something beneficial about tracing the trinity on our bodies. There is something marvelous about the kaleidoscope of describing God's threeness, while affirming and holding to belief in only one God, not a plethora of gods.

There is wisdom to the Trinity, holy and helpful, a blessing.

There is something fetching and delightful, awe-inspiring, and mysterious to live in the community of God's being, dancing around the multiplicity of images, seeking to be stretched and captivated by the poetry and metaphor of language revealed in holy scripture and by holy ancestors, all which help us tell the story of our own connection to this God, and which may draw more people into a meaningful identity with God.

Wisdom is given shape and identity in the Old Testament, the Hebrew scriptures. The value of wisdom we may know about the most as an attribute of King Solomon. But a thread of writing about Lady Wisdom is also woven into the book of Proverbs, Wisdom personified calling out in the streets for people to freely eat and drink from the largess of God's bounty. This is a reading assigned for the Easter Vigil.

In the same book of Proverbs, as we heard in the First Reading today, Wisdom is also suggested as accompanying God in the work of creation at the beginning of time. There as a partner in the crafting of the blue skies way up there and the fountains of water below, the poetry paints a picture of joy in the beauty and order of creation. Side by side, God and Wisdom do their work, so pleased are they in each other, so happy are they with the world, so delighted they are with the human inhabitants of the globe.

That strand of wisdom writing is worth claiming as an image for God along others. I'm glad that Wisdom is known for her invitation to feast. I'm thrilled that Wisdom is shown to be alongside God in the images that reflect the created order. I'm pleased that divine wisdom is also a title that lands on Jesus through the writings of the early church.

Do you know this about the divine wisdom in Jesus? Perhaps if I sing you'll think of it:

*O come, O Wisdom from on high,
embracing all things far and nigh:
in strength and beauty come and stay;
teach us your will and guide our way.*

***Refrain Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.***

This song about Christ as Wisdom emanates joy and hope.

Joy and that hope is poured out for us in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. It is in Jesus that wise Paul opens a window of fresh air in understanding the mysterious ways of God, blown in through faith.

Paul, supreme wordsmith and image-maker, writes about the gift of faith given to Abraham and Sarah when they were so old and had no chance of having children. Paul says that Abraham's trust in God's promises is like the faith we have in Jesus. Jesus' gift of life in God to us is knowable, accessible, like eating and drinking a feast that tastes like hope, like Abraham and Sarah trusting in the promise of a family line and giving birth to Isaac, like being assured that God, Wisdom, Jesus, the Spirit are committed to love us without fail and then finding that love enacted in community.

Hope is a particularly stance of faith. While tornadoes decimate buildings and claim lives in Oklahoma, we cling to hope. We pray that God's love become known to those who have had their town ripped out from under them. We denounce those who say God's judgment is in the tornadoes. God does not cause suffering, as God did not cause Jesus' suffering. We look for God in the midst of suffering, and it is in God that we hope.

Fred Rogers of Mister Rogers's fame related his mother's wisdom when as a child he saw scary things in the news. His mother said, "look for the helpers. You will always find people helping." This is a declaration of hope and faith. Help offered and received in all circumstances signals God's continuing creative and redemptive activity.

As we lay claim to our faith on this unique feast day, together we bless the quest to describe God. We bless the celebration of the Trinity as a gift to the church.

We acknowledge how inadequate our language is in the face of God. So we bless the gift of language, the gift of words, and the gift of silence in the face of mystery.

We look for the helpers, the poets, writers, theologians, musicians, and friends who sit with us to keep us company and pray.

We look to be helpers, to sprinkle the community with wisdom, beauty, and joy, to be present alongside those in grief, who name injustices, and who live by faith.

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