

Sermon on John 16:12-15, Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31
Feast of the Holy Trinity, Sunday, June 16, 2019
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
By James Erlandson

In my lifetime I have heard far too many boring lectures and sermons about theory or doctrine: whether it's Music Theory, Algebra, Geometry or Calculus, theories of evolution or revolution, physics or meta-physics, theologies of the cross or theologies of glory, theologies of liberation versus orthodoxy, or *about* religion – not faith. They suck all the life out of fascinating truths. They all put me to sleep as a teenager, and I just can't write them as a pastor – which is good for you, because they might put you to sleep, too! So while many a pastor dreads the thought of writing a sermon on the “doctrine of the trinity”, to try to defend the theological concept of one God in Three Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to a Jew, a Muslim, or an agnostic, or to compare the persons of the Trinity with the properties of H₂O – gas, liquid, or ice – I prefer a different approach. Seeking the truth of God means hearing stories from scripture and sharing our own experience of faith.

So I like to begin a Sunday sermon by asking questions, such as: *How do you explain the mystery of God – or a 'higher power' - at work in your life and in the world? Where do you see God's work, if at all? How do you experience God in your life? How would you describe what God looks like, or does, to someone else?* Then read the scripture texts appointed for this Holy Trinity Sunday, and look for how they portray God's presence with us in the world. How is God with you and me in times of joy, or times of suffering, challenge, or trial, like when a loved one dies, or your neighbor loses their job or their home? How is God's truth revealed to us, when so much of what we say “we know” about God is shrouded in mystery and hidden from us? Lots of questions, with no right answer. Just a lot of experiences for those who keep their eyes and ears open for God.

For example, my most favorite psalm, Psalm 8. It is a psalm of praise, the first such psalm in the Bible. If you have ever been out in nature at night, camping out, or on the shores of a lake, or in the mountains, you have heard this psalm in your own mind many times, in the words, “*O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth....When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you have set in their courses, what are mere mortals that you should be mindful of them, human beings that you should care for them?*”

Even those who reject church for whatever reason, who don't come to worship because “they can experience God out in nature”, feel the awesomeness of God when they are out in the wilderness, or simply on their deck at night, looking up at the stars (instead of at their tvs, computer monitors, or cell phones). From the

time that we were children into adulthood and old age, you and I can still get the “shivers” looking up at the stars at night, seeing with your own eyes the vastness of God’s creation. And then you contemplate the immense glory of God, even if you don’t “believe” in one of the mainstream faiths, but you are faced with a higher power than yourself, and think “if there is anyone out there who made all of this, and is watching over us, how is it that I am important enough to matter – me, a mere speck of dust in the eyes of the Creator? Or why is there so much evil, suffering and pain in the world right now? And if you can fathom that there is a God who cares about you, and cares deeply for all creatures and the universe that God created, then you are experiencing the First Article of the Creed, the first person of the Trinity, the person who made all of this, just because....of love.

And then you wonder...how could God, or whatever her name is, have entrusted us with all of this on earth, and allow us to care for it in the name of God – and give us the capacity to have curiosity about it so that we wish to explore this world, build on it, and maybe even care for each other? We hear the words “*You have made them rule over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet: all flocks and cattle, even the wild beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatever passes along the paths of the sea.*” Which we have twisted into permission to consume, slaughter and destroy.

Then you and I realize with shame how much we humans have squandered this gift, denied the Wisdom (sometimes called Science) which calls us to take good care of this world and its creatures lest we lose it all and die. And we see each day how we have desecrated this gift from God, dishonored God’s name and insulted the giver of all life by making a mess of everything, dumping garbage and plastic into the oceans, throwing chemicals into the ground which threaten all life – including our own – and seek only profit for ourselves and not our grandchildren’s good in the future. For whenever another creature which God has created goes extinct because of human greed and sin, God suffers. We realize that we need a God of mercy, and are awestruck again when we see the compassion of our God who forgives us again and again. And we say once more: “*O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*” For trusting in God as the Creator of all things is fundamental.

So we read in Paul’s letter to the Romans today about another gift whom God has sent to us, in the gift of God’s son Jesus. This is another way in which we describe to one another how God is with us on earth “in person” – in a human being, Jesus of Nazareth. God’s gift was a carpenter’s son and the son of Mary, a human being, who showed us how to live, how to love God and your neighbor as yourself. Jesus showed us the importance of sitting down and talking with someone different than yourself, who may be rejected by others. Jesus showed us how to die in innocence, with love, compassion and mercy even in death. For

when we experience a loved one die, we begin to know this suffering, which seems so much greater because of the love we have for one who has been lost. Like many of you who have lost a parent, a sibling, a friend or a child, I know how much this love hurts, and so does God. So Paul says, *“since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”* No wonder this is such a favorite scripture that is read at funeral services for the burial of our dead, who have suffered. It recognizes the peace that comes through sharing our lives with someone we love – the love makes the pain hurt all the more, but this also shows how worth it this life has been. So as I have witnessed my own grief, and witnessed the tears of my wife and my children, her sisters, their cousins and all the many friends of Kim’s father, when he died last month, I was reminded how much this human being was loved – the tears were the proof. But tears are so much better than indifference, loneliness or isolation, so we rejoice in the tears and the memories we treasure when we have loved.

So how is it that God is with us, present in our suffering, our pain, and times of challenge or trial? Jesus speaks of this in the gospel, when he said to his disciples on the night of his betrayal, arrest and trial, how even though he was soon to leave them, the Spirit of God would be present with them always to guide them. Jesus said, *“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for the Spirit will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”* Jesus’ promise is that the Spirit will share with us the wonders that are unknowable, as the revealer of the mysteries of God. When there are things we cannot understand, we can go to God in prayer, and ask for the gift of the Spirit to reveal such things to us.....all in God’s time.

So we hear the promise in our first lesson from the book of Proverbs, in which we hear the voice of God in Woman Wisdom: *“Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live. The Lord created me – Wisdom- at the beginning, the first of God’s acts long ago, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth...before the mountains had been shaped, I was brought forth...When God established the heavens, I was there beside God like a master worker; and I was daily God’s delight, rejoicing always, rejoicing in God’s inhabited world and delighting in the human race.”* Woman wisdom has always been there, even when she is not recognized.

So despite our lack of understanding, the wisdom of God is still available to us and cries out to everyone with God's invitation to a new way of living. Despite our inhumanity to others, our mistakes, our gluttony and greed, our jealousies and cravings for what others have, God declares her abundance to us all, and says that there is enough for everyone. Even when we reject others and call them illegal, or undocumented outsiders, aliens or "wetbacks", God calls each one "my children" and gives them all the same invitation of life's abundance and wisdom. Even when we neglect the poor, separate mothers from their children, and lock families in concentration camps along the southern border, put children in cages or detain fathers outside in the desert heat or far away from their families in county jails in Minnesota (like in Sherburne County) for profit, when we make God weep. But God declares them all her beloved children and holds us all in judgment. Even when we think God is far, far away somewhere in heaven and not listening to his poor suffering children here on earth, in hospital rooms, hospices, jail cells or homeless in their cars, God cares and is there with them, and with us always.

The proof is that God still cares for God's creation and continues to create life – each and every day a child is born, a plant grows, and the sun comes up to a new day! Every day a sinner is forgiven by God's grace in the name of Jesus. Jesus "wrote the book" for us on forgiveness, as he showed us how to live a life of mercy and compassion, and showed us how to die with grace. The Spirit still goes out ahead of us to show us the way to wisdom and all truth, and blows us in directions we are afraid to go by ourselves. The promise is still good, mercy is still there for you and me, and the life of Christ is still here waiting for us to follow in faith. So where is God? God is everywhere. Where is Jesus? He is in your heart, and in your neighbor's heart, and in the heartbeats of all God's children in the world. Where is the Spirit now? The Spirit is blowing everywhere in the world with the breath of God, breathing life and creating wisdom, showing you and me God's truth – which is to love God and love your neighbor. This is most certainly true. Thanks be to God! Amen!