

Holy Trinity Sunday Yr C, 26/05/2013  
Prov 8:1-4, 22-31; Ps 8; Rom 5:1-5; Jn 16:12-15  
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“The transcendent and imminent Triune God”

In an AgnusDay cartoon, one sheep turns to the second sheep and says: “I’ve figured out the TRINITY!” The second sheep has a rather surprised look on its face and replies: “You have? That’s one of the great mysteries of the faith.” The first sheep answers the second one in a confident way, by saying: “Sure! It’s one of those ‘three things’ like—‘Larry, Curly and Moe,’ ‘Peter, Paul and Mary,’ Earth, Wind and Fire.’” The second sheep wonders about this and then offers the first sheep the following advice: “Uhh...you might be missing some of the finer points.”

Today is Holy Trinity Sunday. Like the second sheep, we most likely may be missing some of the finer points—for even the best preachers and brightest theologians down through the ages have been unable to capture the full meaning of God the Holy Trinity in one sermon. Indeed, much ink has been spilled addressing the Christian doctrine of God down through the centuries. (I realise that this congregation does not confess the Athanasian Creed on Trinity Sunday, however that is the practice of many Lutheran churches. I would at least encourage you to have a look at this creed, found on pages 54-55 in your *Lutheran Book of Worship*. The Athanasian Creed gives you a brief taste for, what took Christians centuries of engaging in theological gymnastics to reach some degree of consensus on the doctrine of the Trinity). Without question, it is a humbling experience to come before the presence of our Triune God. As preachers and theologians know all-too-well, our words, no matter how profound, wise, creative and insightful fall short of capturing the full essence of God the Holy Trinity.

Yet, having said that, we still rely on our words to give us a glimpse of who the Triune God is—the God who we speak of as transcendent, that is, above

and beyond our human limitations, sometimes referred to as the Wholly Other God; and, at the same time, the God who we speak of as imminent; that is, who has come near to us in the clearest possible way in and through and with the person of Jesus of Nazareth. So with that in mind we turn very briefly to each of our Bible readings today.

In our passage from Proverbs, we are given a picture of God the Creator of heaven and earth who created wisdom before everything else was created. Here wisdom is personified as a woman. One preacher, Frederick Buechner, offers this insight on wisdom personified as a woman: She was there when [God] made the heaven, the sea, the earth. It was as if he needed a woman's imagination to help him make them, a woman's eye to tell him if he'd made them right, a woman's spirit to measure their beauty by.<sup>1</sup> In Michelangelo's famous painting of creation in the Sistine chapel, God is surrounded by angelic beings and there is a woman encircled by God's left elbow. This woman is Michelangelo's interpretation of wisdom.<sup>2</sup>

Turning to Psalm 8, here again we have a picture of God as the Creator. The psalm, in its history, was likely an integral part of Israel's New Year's festival liturgy, which celebrated God the Creator and the blessings of God's creation. Looking at the night sky, the psalmist thinks of the vastness of God and God's creation and how small human beings are in such a huge universe. However speaking in the language of paradox, the psalmist also affirms the dignified place God has given us human beings as stewards of creation. Here a couple of things come to mind. One is the picture of an astronomer looking through their telescope at the vast heavens with a deep sense of awe and wonder as they discover the vastness of the universe. The other is that God has given us people of faith the gifts to manage the earth's resources in ways that are pleasing to God and serve the needs of all human beings while, at the same time, respecting the preservation and well-being of creation for future generations.

Moving to our second lesson, the apostle Paul mentions all three persons of the one, Triune God—speaking of the benefits that God gives us by being

justified by faith. In Romans, Paul employs courtroom language to speak of how God in the person of Jesus paid the penalty, took the rap, for us human beings, even though we are guilty. Think of Jesus paying the fine for your speeding ticket and by doing so making you right with the law and the state again. We have peace with God thanks to Jesus and so we are free to live a life serving him and our neighbour because the Holy Spirit has poured out God's love into our hearts and helps us to go out and share that love with the whole world. Another picture Paul gives us in this passage is that of access to God's grace. Think of it like this: How does one have access to the Prime Minister? Well to be able to meet with and speak to the Prime Minister in his office, one would likely have to either be a relative or a close friend or some dignitary or other, or have someone else who is close to the Prime Minister to introduce us to him. For us Christians, Jesus is that person. He is that Special Person who brings us into God's presence and gives us access to God grace. In fact, so close is Jesus to God the Creator-Father, that he tells us they are one.

Speaking of access, we move on to our gospel today where we learn that the role of the Holy Spirit is to give us access to God by teaching us and revealing God's truth to us.

There is the old story of an old time preacher who told his congregation that he was going to preach on Noah and the Ark the next Sunday. A couple of mischievous boys decided to liven things up a bit and slipped into the church during the week and glued two pages of the Bible together. The following Sunday the preacher began to read: "Noah took himself a wife and she was ..." and then he turned the page and continued reading, "... 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide and 30 cubits high." The preacher paused, and reread the passage to himself again. Finally he turned to the congregation and said, "I've been reading this old Bible for almost 50 years, and have trusted it implicitly, but there are some things that are hard to believe."

The Bible often is hard to understand. It is most difficult to understand when we bring our presuppositions to it and try to make it say what we want rather than listening to what it has to say to us. The marvel of revelation is

that God continues to uncover new truths in the Bible to us all life long.<sup>3</sup> The Holy Spirit continues to teach us and reveal God's truth to us when we are ready for it. This is an ever fresh and ongoing process, since the life of faith is always one of new discovery and growth.

So may we ever remain in awe and wonder as we love, worship and serve our Holy Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Frederick Buechner's comments on Proverbs 8 at: <<http://www.frederickbuechner.com/content/weekly-sermon-illustrations-wisdom>>.

2 Professor Ralph Klein's comments at: <<http://fontes.lstc.edu/~rklein/Documents/easter.htm#Trinity>>.

3 *Emphasis* online, at: <[www.sermonsuite.com/](http://www.sermonsuite.com/)>.