

Trinity Sunday – Bob Munshaw

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

The simple truth is that the truth is not always very simple. A couple months ago, Pastor Ben asked if I would be available to preach today. I knew that I would be done my final papers by now, and I enjoy the opportunities to share from God's word, and so I agreed. This week, as I began to prepare, I discovered that this is Trinity Sunday, and thus my first statement: The simple truth is that the truth is not always very simple.

Pastor Dale Martin reminds us that St. Augustine of Hippo took nearly thirty years of his matured life to write fifteen volumes called "About the Trinity" and was constantly updating and revising his work. If it took Augustine 15 volumes – I will not be presumptuous enough to do anything else than scratch the surface of the Trinity.

Story: St. Augustine – so the story goes – was struggling to understand the doctrine of the Trinity. So he decided to go for a walk on the beach, where he saw a little boy digging a hole in the sand with a seashell. The boy then ran off to the ocean, filling the shell, and rushed back to pour it into the hole he had made. "What are you doing, my little man," St. Augustine asked. "I'm trying to put the ocean into this hole", the boy replied. Augustine suddenly realized that this was precisely what he was trying to do...to fit the great mysteries of God into his mind.

Our lectionary readings for this morning, though, invite us to consider God and the way that God interacts within Himself and interacts with His world. As a child, I remember Sunday school teachers comparing the idea of God as Trinity to the way that water can take the three forms which are? –wait ... water, ice, and steam, and yet are still all water. Pastor Martin uses the idea of an egg, and maybe you've heard this analogy, too. The truth is that all analogies are only tools to help our inadequate minds understand something that is profound.

Illustration: If I take an egg, I have three parts to it: The Shell – would you call that an egg? The White – would you call that an egg? and the Yolk – would you call that egg? Actually the egg is made up of all three parts – the shell, the white and the yolk. The egg is incomplete without one of these elements – yet you would call all of them egg! So it is with the Trinity. The Godhead is one – just as the egg is one – yet made up of three persons The Father, The Son and the Holy Spirit. Just as the egg is made up of the Shell, the White and the Yolk. Yes, Christians do believe in One God, the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit If I was to separate the shell from the white and the white from the yolk of the egg – the egg wouldn't now become three eggs – would it? It would still be one egg! In the same way, there is still only One GOD when we perceive or recognize the three persons Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In the earliest years of the church, thinkers were trying to get a handle on understanding God. On the one hand, they had inherited and affirmed one of the earliest types of creedal statements in the Jewish religion, the shema, which claims – the Lord our God is one! On the other hand, both testaments describe God at work in different ways. You have God creating. There is the Spirit hovering over the deep. In the Jacob narrative, Jacob wrestles the angel, who turns out somehow to be God enfleshed. In the Proverb that was read, wisdom is personified.

The Old Testament historian, William LaSor notes: “Here Wisdom is pictured as a woman calling the human family to follow her instruction and find the meaning of life. ... (The) personalization peaks in 8:22-26, where Wisdom claims to have been created before all else, even suggesting that she assisted God in creation. But, these claims are more practical than theological: Wisdom presents her credentials so as to attract cordial allegiance. ... The Hebrew’s thought and wrote in concrete, not theoretical, terms. This resistance to speculation often lead their poets to treat inanimate objects or ideas as though they had personality.” In fact, Wisdom is often personified in the Old Testament.

LaSor adds – “This personification, which became even more important during the intertestamental period, has made significant contributions to New Testament Christology. The doctrine of the logos “Word” in John 1:1-14 is based, at least in part on Prov. 8: both wisdom and the logos exist from the beginning, are active in creation, and have a life giving influence. Similarly, Paul’s description of the lordship of Christ in Col. 1:15-20 contains overtones of Prov. 8, and the specific references to Christ as the source of true wisdom in I Cor.1:24-30 are deeply rooted in Proverbs.”

While the Trinity is never addressed specifically in the Bible, references to the three persons of the Trinity abound. Our Romans reading is just one example of a place where all three persons of the Trinity are referenced together. Take a look again at the passage as I read it.
Romans 5–Peace and Joy (1-5)

1Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we^[a] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we^[b] rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. 3Not only so, but we^[c] also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

I mentioned that the early Christian thinkers were trying to figure this out. Gregory of Nyssa claimed that this was all people were talking about in the streets. He said, “If you ask about coins, a vendor discourses with you about ‘Generate’ and ‘Ingenerate’. If you inquire about the price of bread, he replies that ‘the Father is greater and the Son is subordinate.’ If you ask whether the bath is ready, he offers the definition that ‘the Son is from the nonexistent.’” Wouldn’t you be surprised if you were to go to McDonalds for some chicken nuggets, only to

have the cashier engage you in a conversation about whether or not the Son was equal to the Father. But this was the environment in which the Nicene creed was worked out.

Each Sunday, we recite the apostle's creed and affirm our Trinitarian theology. I sometimes wonder if the words have become so rote for us that we forget ... or maybe we don't even stop to consider the significance of what we are saying.

We begin – I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth

In the 8th Psalm, David affirms this creed, but he does so in words that draw us in ... to consider their significance, and to perhaps set us in our place -- He says:

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, 4 what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?

We bought an old wicker-type rocking chair at the Apostolic Church Garage Sale last week. The chair cost \$5, and we set it on our porch with the idea that we'd be able to sit and read, and just enjoy being outside ... and even if the old rocker doesn't last past the summer, it was only \$5. Sitting on the porch invites me to slow down a little bit and reflect. My view from the porch isn't perfect, but it is pretty. From the deck, I can enjoy our beautiful Japanese maples. From there, I can have the benefit of shelter as we enjoy the late afternoon and evening thunderstorms, and I am so looking forward to the return of the fireflies and the rhythmic hum of the cicada's. I'm also in the process of putting up feeders so as to enjoy the hummingbirds, the cardinals, the squirrels. These are treats that we didn't get to enjoy in our region of Canada.

The beauty, the danger, the majesty of the work of God's hand – when do we pause to consider all the things that we enjoy as gifts of God? The taste of ice cream on a hot day ... a cup of hot coffee in the morning ... a hot dog and soda on memorial day ... the ability and the opportunity to love and to be loved – are these not things that might cause us to pray – our father who art in heaven, may your name be hallowed?

Our apostles creed continues ... and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord
In the creed, we affirm several theological propositions about Jesus, the second person of the Trinity – He was:

conceived by the Holy Ghost,

Born of the Virgin Mary,

Suffered under Pontius Pilate,

Was crucified, dead, and buried:

He descended into hell;

The third day he rose again from the dead;

He ascended into heaven,

And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;

From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

It is important that we affirm these propositions, but they tell us little to nothing about the mission and the message of Jesus, which we are called to join. The creed doesn't paint us a picture of the kindness and the compassion and the power of Jesus. This is why it is important for us individually and corporately to return to the Gospel stories over and over again ... to watch as Jesus has compassion on the woman caught in adultery, to listen in as he talks with Nicodemus about being born again, or to the Samaritan woman at the well, where he reminds her that real God-followers aren't caught up in legalism, but experience the living water and worship God in spirit and in truth. We need to see Jesus as his heart breaks over the city of Jerusalem or at the death of friends like Lazarus and John the Baptist. We also need to hear ... to really hear what it is that Jesus is saying as he preaches to the crowd, and also, we need to reflect on what he is saying as he has more intimate conversations with his disciples.

In this morning's Gospel reading, we find Jesus, and He is at the end of His earthly ministry. Soon, he will be returning to be with the Father. To set the context, this teaching of Jesus took place after the last supper. Right before they celebrated this 'last supper', he put a towel around his waist and washed their nasty stinky feet, and commissioned them to serve each other in the same way. By his words and by his actions, he is preparing them for this time that Kent talked to us about two weeks ago, the ascension, when he would no longer be bodily with them. At the end of John 14, Jesus leads them out of the home where they had been celebrating the Passover meal and on towards the garden of gethsemane.

This talk has been titled Jesus farewell discourse. It is a talk that covers several chapters in John, and in our Gospel reading this morning, we find him focusing on the Holy Spirit. In the creed, we read very briefly – I believe in the Holy Spirit, but again, this doesn't tell us much about what it is that we are asserting. But, our passage is more helpful.

Jesus is reminding his followers that in some profound way, once he has returned to heaven, the third person of the Trinity ... the Holy Spirit ... will come to live with them, as he lives with us. What does that mean. It means that somehow, God is intimately in our lives. Jesus says that if we listen, he will guide us into all truth. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus says that the Spirit is a Counselor who will convict us of sin. Jesus uses a little play on words in John 3, saying that the wind blows where it wishes and we don't know where it is going. It's the same with all of us who are born of the Spirit. God is at work in his world, and it is the person of the Spirit who is leading, guiding, and gifting His church.

This is a little dangerous, and a lot simplistic, but if I could provide one small and wholly inadequate starting point for relating to God in His three persons, we might say that:

We worship the Father as creator and sustainer.

We gaze upon the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, listening to words and following his example.

We allow the still small voice of the Spirit to speak into our lives to guide, correct, and form us as followers.

But we recognize still that all three are one, and not three, in a way that is indeed profound, and we are invited in ever deeper ways to experience the love and grace and transforming power of God in our lives.

Amen!