

**Homily, St. Andrew's
Trinity Sunday, May 22, 2016
Psalm 8; Proverbs 8**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be ever more acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.

Today is Trinity Sunday. It is our only liturgical celebration of a core doctrine of the church, making it distinct from the rest of the year when we remember key moments in Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection. In this season after Pentecost, Ordinary Time, our focus shifts to the on-going life of the Risen Christ in and through the gathered community of the church - the body of Christ. The significance of this transition is marked by the length of it. While the transition from death to life happens in an instant at Easter, we have been marking this transition in stages over the past few weeks: first with the Risen Christ's Ascension to the heavens and last week with the arrival of the Holy Spirit to enliven, comfort and strengthen us at Pentecost. If our story were in the format of the stage play, the second act starring Jesus has ended, intermission is over, and today the third act starring the on-going life of Christ's body, the church, really gets rolling.

The doctrine of the Trinity, as we know it from our creeds, is nowhere to be found in the bible. It was worked out in the early church through a long process of debate and discussion. We learned about some of that process in Lent with our exploration of heresy and orthodoxy. In a very small nutshell, it was through a series of conferences and councils that the boundaries of Christian doctrine were established. It became heresy, for instance, to understand Jesus Christ as less than fully human, or less than fully God; it became heresy to believe the human "substance" in Jesus was overshadowed by the divine "substance"; and, it became orthodoxy to understand the Holy Spirit as fully God while still a separate 'person.' To fully understand these terms and the debates and decisions about orthodoxy that they represent, one needs to be fairly well versed in the Ancient Greek thought-world that produced them and that is significantly different than our own.

One of the most succinct summaries of ancient and modern theological work regarding the Trinity comes from Kathleen Norris in her book *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*. There she writes that the "Trinity... has generated some of the most obtuse, mind-boggling writing in all of Christian theology." (287) She goes on with her own description of the Trinity as the interplay of unity and diversity in community, writing that "the primary symbol [is] of a community that holds together by containing diversity within itself." (289) It is intriguing to consider that our conception of God is, at its heart, a community of Three, unified by its diversity. It means that we can't nail God down to any one thing in particular... God is not just Creator of all, the supreme ruler of the universe. God is not just a humble preacher, teacher and healer who get crucified by oppressive forces of power and control. God is not just a Spirit who dwells within people and who we know in wind and fire. God is not just any one of these things, but rather the Trinity teaches us that God is the creative force found in the tension between the real differences represented in all these ideas, stories, metaphors or realities. It is diversity that holds God together and is the basis of God's unity and power.

We hear something of this creative unity and power in our reading this morning from Proverbs featuring one of the bible's most intriguing characters in Woman Wisdom. Calling from the centre of town, imploring us to listen to her, Woman Wisdom describes her place in creation... "The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago." And what follows is a re-telling of the creation story, with Wisdom right there with God "in the beginning." The poem takes us back to the creation story in Genesis 1 when "in the beginning, God created heaven and earth..." It also takes us forward into the new creation story in the beginning of the Gospel of John, when "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." In between these 2 "in the beginning's" is Wisdom, like a master worker, dancing beside Yahweh at creation, "rejoicing in the inhabited world, and delighting in the human race."

There is scholarly debate about whether or not this Wisdom should be considered divine. There is no definitive answer but what we can say is that at least for some, Jesus Christ has been interpreted through the lens of Wisdom. The Hebrew word "Hochmah" is translated into Greek as "Sophia," which over time transformed into the more popular Greek concept of "Logos" or Word. The transition is even found in the book of Sirach in the apocrypha (see 42:15)... not quite biblical but not not-biblical either. Jesus, of course, came to be understood as Logos incarnate - the Word made flesh... the Word made flesh whose ancient ancestor was personified as Woman Wisdom and who calls out to us today from the pages of sacred history. The divine relationship has always been something of a sacred mystery.

The sacred mystery, the sacred diversity, continues in our assigned Psalm today. Psalm 8 is a creation psalm with a twist. Like Proverbs 8, Psalm 8 echoes Genesis 1 by offering an orderly account of creation. Creation theology generally expresses the certainty of life's regularity ordained by a God who orders and blesses His creation, making us safe and free to live abundantly. The twist in Psalm 8 is how it speaks of humanity and humanity's role in creation. In the midst of expressing the glory of God in the heavens, the moon and the stars, the psalmist suddenly asks: "what are human beings that you are mindful of them; mortals that you care for them?" And then comes the answer in the central verse of the psalm: "You have made them a little lower than God [angels], and crowned them with glory and honour."

All of a sudden, while we're still gazing up at the stars and the moon, wondering about our small and flawed human existence in relationship to a magnificent God, the psalmist declares the special place God has given humanity. As the psalm continues into its second half, humanity is given responsibility for creation: "You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet." Well before Jesus came to earth; well before the Holy Spirit officially made a dramatic entrance; well before the church, the Body of Christ in the world, was born... God was already partnering with humanity for the on-going care of creation. God made us only "a little lower than God" and crowned *us* with glory and honour, and so we can never say we are unworthy or powerless. We are responsible, with God, for creation. God trusts us and believes in us and God calls us to live into our special status as only "a little lower than angels." It is a stunning twist at the central point in a poem that both begins and ends with the power and glory, the magnificence, of God.

Walter Brueggemann writes that Psalm 8: “recognizes that humankind is the crown and pinnacle of creation, but even human power is shaped and qualified by doxology.” (38) He emphasizes the importance of holding the centre and the margins of the psalm together – the praise of God as Sovereign Lord, and our responsibility for the rest of creation. It means that we don’t get to say that “it’s all up to us” nor that “it’s all up to God.” Instead, the psalm acknowledges both... as a friend of mine once said: we act and God acts... and through both, life happens. We make things happen by our will and our actions, and we’d be foolish to think that we’re in control. It is neither humanist nor theist... or perhaps it is both theist and humanist. God is not subsumed into the created world... no, God is exalted, majestic, sovereign. And humanity is not powerless in the face of an Almighty God... no, humanity is clothed with glory and honour, called to care for creation and boldly take our place just below the heavenly beings.

Just how it all works is a sacred dance of significant mystery. A dance can be analyzed, broken down to component parts, described and explained, but ultimately all that falls short of the experience of both dancing and witnessing a dance. So it is with all sacred relationships, particularly those symbolized by the Trinity itself. The unity of one God, indivisible, of one substance found in the creative tension between three distinct and undefiled “persons” will never have an explanation that truly satisfies. The personification of semi-Divine Wisdom transformed into Word Incarnate will never be proven scientifically. Small and flawed human beings exalted to an almost heavenly status will never seem very reasonable. None of it makes much sense and so it’s best to just dance. To honour the diversity among us as the source of our strength and power as the Body of Christ in the world. To embrace our role as co-creators with God in the care of the world. To praise the community of faith that IS God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier; Yahweh, Wisdom and Breath. And finally, to live in thanksgiving for the gift of God’s abundant grace in it all.