

Love and Delight

Trinity Sunday

May 30, 2010

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Texts: Proverbs 8.1-4, 22-31;
Psalm 8;
Romans 5.1-5;
John 16.12-15

I have a front row seat these days to the ways that children delight in life. I can walk through the door with a furrowed brow puzzling over some unresolved question from my day that feels so important with this intense seriousness about life. And then I see my girl dancing around the kitchen, skipping up and down the hall, giggling and singing to herself, full of the wonder of the day. That scene never fails to lighten the load and to remind me that life is full and God is good and wisdom will emerge if I would just let go and join my girl in dancing around the kitchen, giving thanks to God for the incredible gift of life.

Children are so good at wonder because life is still so new and each day holds new discoveries and new intricacies not noticed before. That sense of awe captured by our Psalmist today is something children can teach us about. Things we might take for granted find their way into the bedtime prayers of children. This is one heard in our household this week. After I thought we were done with prayer for the evening and I was saying my good nights, I heard this little voice say: "Thank you, God, for my nose." The things we walk right on past are cause for praise and appreciation in the eyes of a child who is amazed by every new thing they discover. We have a lot to learn from the children in our midst.

Once you've lived somewhere for a long time sometimes an out of town visitor can help you (in the same way) notice some of the gifts you walk right past every day. As you take this guest around you rediscover what an incredible place this is where we all live: the lakeshore and the dunes, the trails, and the farmland, all within a stone's throw of this beautiful downtown with a bustling farmers market, local shops, artists, and

musicians. I'm not naïve; I know we have a lot to do to make the resources of this community available and accessible to all who live here. Those are the kinds of questions that can furrow the brow and weigh heavy on our minds. Walking around the beauty of this place where we live and watching my girl this week delight in her life and express that joy to God in prayer – those were the images that I carried with me as I encountered our texts this week.

We celebrate Trinity Sunday today. I laughed when I read one author this week make the claim that sermons around the country on Trinity Sunday often seek to answer the questions that no one in the pews is asking. Am I right that few of you have moved through your week with burning questions about the nature of God as One Being but three Persons? The early church in its first several centuries did wrestle with those questions. The Nicene Creed which we will use as our confession of faith today delineates where some of the battle lines were drawn when it comes to the doctrine of the trinity. I took a whole course on the history of this doctrine. There is a lot we could explore together today; fascinating discussions about the nature of God and about the history of the church.

But the texts that are before us today are not doctrinal in nature. Each of these texts seeks to draw us not into some questions about the nature of God but seeks to draw us into life with God. I want us to hear both parts of that last phrase: drawn *into life* and *with God*. This passage from Proverbs is a kind of unbelievable text in many ways. First of all we have Wisdom in this text, which is an aspect of God, personified as a woman. That alone, when you think about the culture and context, is pretty amazing. Secondly, we find here in Judaism, these are after all Hebrew texts we are reading, that there was already a sense of God's participation in human life. God is not distant, detached, and invisible. This text claims that God is known as people respond to the call of Wisdom.

Where is Wisdom to be found? The answer of this text is on the heights and beside the way. These are the pathways of travel. She is on your morning commute and your summer vacation. She takes her stand at the crossroads – those places of discernment and decision. I know our graduates (whom we will celebrate next week) know something about that space...what it

means to listen for the voice of Wisdom in the midst of all the conflicting and confusing choices that are before you. Wisdom calls from the gates in front of the town and at the entrance of the portals. The image here is that the Wisdom of God is found at the center of life at the places where you already live. As I've said before, you don't have to go on some pilgrimage. There is no sacred temple where the secret of life is found. Wisdom here isn't even limited to the sages in our midst – the ones who have accumulated the most knowledge and expertise. They may be a resource for where Wisdom can be discerned or they may not. Interestingly as Wisdom describes her origins, as she lays out the case for why you should trust her as the one who was present with God at creation, she does not describe her wisdom as coming from serious minded contemplation.

The image is of a child delighting and dancing with God as together they create the world. They enjoy not only the creativity of that work but revel in each other's presence. And then going forward they rejoice in the world itself and delight in the human race. Verse 30 describes Wisdom as being beside God, like a master worker. I read a number of Hebrew scholars who claim that word translated here as master worker can have the sense of an architect or advisor which is clearly how these translators interpreted the word. Or the word can have the meaning of a child at play.¹ Before I even read about the discussion of the meaning of that word – that's the sense I got from this text. To follow the call of Wisdom is to rediscover that child-like capacity to play and dance and revel in life. As we listen for Wisdom at those crossroads, and on the way, in the midst of the center of life – we discover that is where God lives: in the center. So that the deeper we engage with life the clearer the voice of Wisdom will become.

But lest we think that God lives only in those places of celebration and creativity and delight, we have this text from Romans. Paul develops this line of thinking more fully in 1 Corinthians but you hear echoes of it in this passage from Romans as well. Paul seems to be addressing an influence in the early church that suggested that those who were faithful would be

¹ Alyce M. McKenzie, *Preaching Biblical Wisdom in a Self Help Society*, Abingdon Press, 2004, 114.

known by their success and influence.² There was an equation made that goes both directions: if you are faithful then you will be successful and if you are successful and influential then you must be faithful. That theology seems to be alive and well today in some circles. So the thinking goes that those who suffer must be in some way lacking in faith. When you live in a shame based culture as Paul did, then to suffer was not only painful for the sake of the suffering itself but now there was this added sense of shame attached to that suffering. It was a lovely two for one - double whammy.

Paul here makes the case that faith gives us is access to God and what God gives to us is grace - not success or power or influence - but grace. God is not impressed by our resume and credentials. And God is not put off by our sin or failures. God offers us unconditional acceptance and forgiveness - the kind that gives to you a sense of peace and wholeness at the depths of your soul – a place that is untouched by the circumstances of your life whether that is wild success or unbelievable suffering. That is the kind of love that fuels the dance of the trinity.

That is one of the early images for the trinity: a dance of love. Augustine said it this way: the Father is the One who loves, the Son is the one who is the Beloved, and the Spirit is the Love that flows between them. Our faith gives us access to this grace. It sweeps us up into this triune dance. And that is the source of our hope in the midst of suffering; this love of God that keeps getting poured into our life. It can give to us the strength and endurance we need for the difficult seasons of our life. And it is the same love that soaks into us as we revel in the wonder and joy of life.

If you haven't yet received your newsletter, I encourage you when you open it to take the green insert that Pastor Gordon offered to us as a rhythm of prayer for the summer. He gave to us some Celtic prayers for the morning, mid-day, and the evening. Celtic spirituality understood that the doctrine of the trinity was best understood through the language of

² William Loader describes this background in his article "First Thoughts on Year C *Epistle* Passages from the Lectionary: Trinity"

worship (not unlike the ascension we celebrated two weeks ago). As I've prayed more in this spiritual tradition I've noted how often their prayers invoke the triune God. So the morning prayers begin:

I arise today in the strength of the mighty Creator,
in the strength of the rising Savior,
in the strength of the life-giving Spirit
In the strength of the mighty three whose love is One.

And I've also noted how this tradition of trinitarian prayer is deeply connected to a sense of God's presence in all aspects of life. So the evening prayers begin:

God of rest, as I lay down in my bed, I rest:
My hopes....my fears
My longings...my thankfulness
My anxieties....my faith
I rest myself in God, the community of the three in me.³

As we celebrate the Trinity today and continue in the days ahead to meditate on the nature of God, my prayer is that we will discover ourselves swept up into the love and delight of our Triune God.

And may all praise be to God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

³ From Celtic Blessings: Prayers for Everyday Life, compiled by Ray Simpson (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1999).