

## Secrets For Living a Good Life

2 Pentecost C

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### **First Reading: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31**

*In the Bible, wisdom is portrayed in terms sometimes human & sometimes divine. Often, wisdom is personified as feminine. In this passage, Woman Wisdom is depicted not only as the first creation of God, but also as God's helper, rejoicing in God's creation, especially in human beings.*

<sup>1</sup>Does not Wisdom call, & does not Understanding raise her voice? <sup>2</sup>On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her st&;

<sup>3</sup>beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out: <sup>4</sup>"To you, O people, I call, & my cry is to all that live.

<sup>22</sup>"The Lord created me at the beginning of creation, the first of the Lord's acts of long ago. <sup>23</sup>Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. <sup>24</sup>When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. <sup>25</sup>Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth—<sup>26</sup>when the Lord had not yet made earth & fields, or the world's first bits of soil. <sup>27</sup>I was there when the Lord established the heavens, & drew a circle on the face of the deep, <sup>28</sup>& made firm the skies above, & established the fountains of the deep, <sup>29</sup>& assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress the Lord's comm&, when the foundations of the earth were marked out, <sup>30</sup>then I was beside the Lord, like a master worker; & I was daily the Lord's delight, rejoicing before the Lord always, <sup>31</sup>rejoicing in the Lord's inhabited world & delighting in the human race."

### **Gospel: John 16:12-15**

*Jesus' ongoing presence w/ the disciples will be made known thru the coming Spirit who will guide them & communicate to them Jesus' will & glory.*

<sup>12</sup>"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>13</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, you will be guided you into all the truth; for the Spirit will not speak out of the Spirit's own authority, but will speak whatever the Spirit hears, & will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup>The Spirit will glorify me, taking what is mine & declaring it to you. <sup>15</sup>All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that the Spirit will take what is mine & declare it to you."

## **Overview - Drawn into Relationship, Guided into Truth**

The doctrine of the Trinity invites us to consider how a God constituted by relationship—the Father with the Son, the Son with the Spirit, the Spirit with the Father—draws us into that relationship with God & one another. Gradually or suddenly, through the work of the Spirit, we come to know our belonging to the Father & to Christ's body. In such loving relationships, truth is discovered. But people cannot bear the truth all at once, so discipleship & faith formation are gradual processes of listening for the Spirit's voice. Christian practices such as worship, learning, & service are occasions for people of all ages to be "guided into truth." Such practices are rooted in baptism, in which God draws us into a lifelong relationship in which we grow into truth & love over time—guided by the Spirit, accompanied by Jesus, & having peace with the Father.

## **Theological Reflection**

The Apostles' Creed is a teaching tool for what Christians believe about God—Father, Son, & Holy Spirit. The creed also serves as a prayer & a way for the community to carry one another in faith. Each article of the creed functions as a job description of one of the three persons of the united Godhead. It is particularly important to note that the third article describes the Spirit's ongoing work of bringing creation out of chaos. What would the church, the community, forgiveness, or resurrection be without the Spirit? Holy Trinity is a good day to explore the many & various ways God is at work in the world, from the beginning of time through to the present.

## **Sensory Idea**

Attempts to explain the Holy Trinity in either function or form fall flat because of the limitations of language. Words cannot fully explain the height, depth, & breadth of a God who is three-in-one. Using a Hula-Hoop, a drawn circle, or even a large bowl, place the different ways we describe God into the circle or bowl—either verbally, written out, or symbolized with small objects. Even as our descriptions all fit in the circle, there is still more space outside the circle than inside. The life of faith involves asking for God's help as we learn to enlarge the circle of our trust & understanding to embrace the largeness of the mystery of God.

## **Theological Reflection**

In Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's novella *The Little Prince*, the fox explains to the title character that becoming friends means "to establish ties." Wisdom has been a friend of God, with established ties, since before creation began. Wisdom's relationship with God is more than intellectual information; it's a rejoicing cooperation in God's creation & will. How does wisdom tie people of faith to God for this life as well as for the life of the world to come?

## **Illustration**

Create a space for painting or art making with art materials that blend well (for example, tempera paint, watercolors, oil crayons, chalk, modeling clay). Provide only the primary colors of red, yellow, & blue. Black & white materials might also be used, but only in combination with the primary colors. Stencils or drawings may be provided, as well as blank canvas or paper. The three primary colors stand on their own & cannot be made from combinations of other colors. Whether discernable because of light or natural pigment, these colors are beyond our full understanding. We may experience them with more brightness or more shadow, but they are always present. In addition to their omnipresence, the primary colors relate to one another in unique ways to make other colors, just like the unique relational aspects of the Trinity.

## **Let the Children Come**

Challenge children to listen for &/or circle in the worship folder places we speak or sing about the Trinity in today's liturgy & hymns. How many can they find? Are the holy Three named the same way every time? While it is tempting to preach or teach about the three persons of the Trinity using concrete illustrations like ice, water, & steam, instead give thanks for what the three persons *do*. Sometimes we teach that God creates, Jesus redeems, & the Spirit sustains, but God in three persons does all of these simultaneously! Don't get too preoccupied with explaining (or understanding) the Trinity, but rejoice in the mystery of what God in three persons is doing in our midst.

## **Connections with Creation**

In David R. Weiss's children's book *When God Was a Little Girl* (Chicago: ACTA Publications, 2015), a father tells his daughter, "When God was a little girl, she liked art projects . . . which is a good thing, because that's how the world came to be." He describes the joy & creativity of God imaged as a vivacious girl lovingly creating the universe. One of the best, most effective things we can do for environmental advocacy

is to teach children to love God's creation & to be creative themselves. Today's readings in Proverbs 8 & Psalm 8 depict God & Wisdom playfully creating & crafting the stuff of the universe & the earth, as if the cosmos is a giant sandbox to let holy imagination roam free. Holy Trinity Sunday invites us to be expansive in our language & imagery of God as a way to embrace the blessed diversity of all creation.

## **The Holy Trinity**

Trinity Sunday, the first Sunday following Pentecost (which is a day, not a season), has been kept since the tenth century as a special celebration of the mystery of the Triune God. Trinity Sunday is similar to the Baptism of Our Lord, in that each follows a season with a Trinitarian focus. It is not helpful to begin a sermon by talking in a deprecatory manner about doctrine: Trinitarian doctrine, meditating on such biblical passages as we proclaim today, proposes language with which to praise our incomprehensible God. Rather than dismiss such language, we bow before the mystery it hopes to proclaim.

### **John 16:12-15**

John's gospel, written in the late first century, alternates narratives that are usually referred to as "signs" (see 2:11) with "discourses," long speeches that declare the Christological intent of the sign. Today's gospel comes from the longest discourse, chapters 14–17, which precedes the greatest sign, Christ's death & resurrection. Jesus promises that the Father will disclose the truth, which comes in the Spirit of the Son. In this early Johannine proclamation of the Trinity, the Father & the Spirit both attest to the truth of Christ. The evangelist is assuring the Christian communities that they have received the truth, despite the controversies that were dividing the unity of early believers. That we are called Christian, the ones marked by Christ, is clear in this passage: the Father & the Spirit declare the truth we have witnessed in the crucified & risen Christ. Today in worship we receive this truth in the proclamation of this word.

### **Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31**

Coming to its present form in about the fourth century bce, the book of Proverbs belongs to the Old Testament wisdom tradition. The collection of sayings, compiled over several centuries, makes no reference to Israelite history or to the theology of election. Originally used in boys' schools, Proverbs includes passages in which wisdom is described as a good woman who offers knowledge, & evil is pictured as a foolish woman who tempts people away from the correct path. In this poem, Wisdom is

God's first creation who then assists in the creation of the world. It may be that this poetic imagery developed in reaction to the myths of Israel's neighbors in which a goddess assists a god in creation. For Israelites, the Lord is the only god. Christ, to whom the Trinity attests, was likened by the church fathers to this Woman Wisdom. Here already God is described as a plurality. For Christians, God is triune from the beginning: thus traditional biblical translations saw in Genesis 1:2-3 the Creator God, the Spirit (*ruah*), & the Word ("& God said"). In Christianity, the created world is very good, filled with the goodness of the triune Creator.

## Images in the Readings

The Christian writings of the first century give only the beginnings of what became the developed doctrine of the Trinity of **Father, Son, & Spirit**. The poem in Proverbs relies on the ancient Near Eastern literary image of **Woman Wisdom**. Some ancient religions, such as that in Egypt, assigned to a goddess the wisdom of the universe. Like the figure of Justice that we are familiar with, she knows truth & weighs it in her balance. Wisdom, in Hebrew *hokmah*, is a feminine noun & thus was easy to personify as a mighty woman. Scholars disagree to what extent this imagery was merely a literary convention for early Judaism, or whether instead it points to popular belief in a goddess as Yahweh's consort. For Christians speaking Greek, the poem in John 1 exemplifies the replacement of Wisdom with the Word, *logos* being a masculine noun. Christ is our Woman Wisdom, who participated in God's creation of the world: see for example stanza 2 in "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" (ELW 257).

## Connections with the Liturgy

The rite of Confession & Forgiveness begins in the name of the Trinity. The greeting to begin the liturgy proclaims the Trinity. Worship concludes with a Trinitarian blessing. Christian worship begins & ends not the usual social hello of "Good morning" & "Bye, now." Rather, we are privileged to stand within & under uniquely Christian phrases: we give to one another & we receive the grace, love, & communion of the Triune God.

## A Hymn for the Day

With his text "Come, join the dance of Trinity" (ELW 412), Richard Leach made available to contemporary worshipers an image used by those church fathers who wrote of the *perichoresis*, the dancing around, the interweaving, of the persons of the Trinity in the divine life. The stanzas proclaim the dancing God as creator, as Jesus

Christ, & as the Spirit of freedom, & we are invited to join in God's dance. The image of dancing with God is a welcome addition to the church's dominant far more stagnant picture of the Trinity. Leach, who previously served as a pastor in the United Church of Christ, is now a lay member of the ELCA.

## **Life on the Earth**

We hear today the ancient poem in Proverbs that describes creation, in which, for example, God puts boundaries on the sea so that the land will not be swamped. For Christians, no matter what the current understanding of the process of the formation of the universe, the triune God was prior to the universe; the Trinity brought about a good universe; & the Trinity delights in the human race. Contemporary Christians need not fear that the Big Bang blows apart these beliefs.

(Thanks to [SundaysandSeasons.com](http://SundaysandSeasons.com))

## **Ideas on Wisdom**

- Different from Intelligence, Education, Academics, Experience
- It is that which invites us into lifelong, deeper understandings, insights, connections and relationships to more fully experience & share in God & the Gift of Life & Salvation.
- In limited conservative views its highest form is often Moral Perfection; Biblically it is discernment & courageous compassion to follow God's Will.