

TRINITY SUNDAY JUNE 12, 2022

The doctrine of the Trinity is an attempt to describe what has been experienced by people who have experienced God. In our Proverbs reading, the Wisdom of God is active in creation and Wisdom is portrayed as a woman. "The Lord created me at the beginning of his work," she says. God created her first. She was there when he made the heavens, the sea, and the earth. "I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always," she says, as if it were her joy in what God was creating sanctified creation. Solomon, referring to Wisdom, said: "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

The figure of personified Wisdom that arose in Proverbs remained an important symbol as Judaism developed in the Hellenistic world, focussing on her Greek name Sophia. Works in the period between the old and new testaments, like the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon, developed her portrait as acting at God's command, ordering the cosmos and revealing God to Israel.

Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, used Wisdom and the Logos, interchangeably as symbols of the workings of God in the world. Wisdom, has been, at varying times in Scriptures and in church history, identified with both Son and Holy Spirit. In John's Gospel prologue, we see the attribution to the Logos, which was in the beginning with God at work in creation. With the split between Eastern and Western Christianity, Wisdom grew to be neglected in Western Christianity. Most early church writers followed Philo's lead and identified Wisdom with the Logos, and thus, with the divine in Jesus. Others, like Irenaeus of Lyons, identified her with the third person of the Trinity.

Wisdom says of herself: "then I was beside him like a 'master worker,' and delighting in the human race." So Personified Wisdom, whether we identify her with Jesus or the Holy Spirit, delights in the human race and in all God's creation and is present and active with God in the process. This is a key to the intimate and dynamic nature of God. God the Trinity is not Aristotle's "Unmoved Mover." God isn't the disinterested Creator of Deism. God is the Dancing Trinity, who in the form of Wisdom, likes to have fun, who smiles, and frolics with the inhabitants of the earth. What an image – the God who loves to play.

Although the readings from John and Romans are more formal, they too help us recognize that there is more to God than a singular view might suggest. In Romans, the focus is on peace and hope, both of which come to us through Christ. We have peace with God through Christ. It is a peace that is received by faith and brings to us righteousness because of God's faithfulness. God is the actor, and Jesus is the mediator of that action. One of the most challenging elements of our secular age is a distinct loss of hope regarding the meaning of our everyday life. Paul offers a profound and powerful understanding of hope that has the potential to give us what we need and want, but too often struggle to find.

One way to define the secular age is as a loss of transcendence. People don't expect God to be a part of their lives or world, even when they believe in God. Rather than look to the

transcendent for meaning, we look instead to the imminent, to the concrete, and, particularly, in our culture, to the material. But, often, our material accomplishments haven't been as meaningful as we had hoped they would. As a result, we wonder what significance our daily occupations, relationships, and even lives have. So, with a loss of transcendence comes a loss of meaning and loss of hope.

Although Paul is talking about the grace and glory we have received in Christ, he does not anchor our hope there. While the promise of future glory certainly generates hope, Paul doesn't stop there. He says: "we also boast in our suffering, producing hope and hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." Paul roots our hope not only in the "things above," that is the transcendent promises of God, but also in the "things below," our own struggles and suffering that are hallowed by God's presence and love.

God does not want us to suffer, nor causes our suffering, nor delights in suffering. Ever. But, God does promise to be with us, and to use our suffering for some greater good, and to redeem our suffering by joining it to Christ's own. No tear shed goes unnoticed by God. No frustration or hurt or loss is unimportant to God. No tragedy, personal, communal, national, or global is ignored by God. God is present in all our suffering and dignifies it by God's presence.

We can find God in the concrete, ordinary, and the every day forms our lives take: in our relationships, our jobs, hobbies, volunteer activities, and more. God hallows all of this, promising to use anything done for the good of the neighbour as a way to extend God's love and concern to all God's beloved people.

Paul ties our suffering to Jesus' own and invites us to recognize God's presence not only in the distant heavens, but also, and even more in the daily struggles of our lives; trusting, promising, that this kind of hope does not disappoint.

This was revolutionary, even scandalous talk in Paul's age, as Stoics warned against hope because it might disappoint, and Hedonists scoffed at hope because it meant delaying pleasure. Many in our world of instant gratification may wonder why we'd boast of struggles and suffering, while today's stoical pundits often scoff at Christian faith as a "false hope."

Nevertheless, we believe that this hope is not only true in the long run, but powerful in the here and now as it hallows our daily labour, ordinary relationships, and daily struggles, both routine and monumental as places God chooses to be. "The present, the time being, is often the hardest time of all." And that is where God showed up in Jesus and still shows up when we gather to hear his word and when we leave to share it as both word and deed.

So where is God in places like the Texas shooting? In Afghanistan? in Ukraine? God is working through rescue workers, comforting the grieving, encouraging those who are helping, and guiding those who try to plan to avoid such disasters in the future. And where

is God in our sometimes painfully mundane lives? Present with us in the struggles, rejoicing in the triumphs, nurturing our best relationships, encouraging us to care for those around us and to receive their care in turn, using us and even our daily routines to love and care for the world and people God loves so much.

As we persevere and endure through our problems, challenges, even suffering, character is produced, and it is this character that leads to hope. Hope isn't mere whimsy, it is deeply rooted trust that God is faithful. This hope is related to the love of God poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, given to us. There is a trinity of attributes; faith, hope, and love. We could add into the mix peace, but perhaps peace is the result of these three. These three make an early Trinitarian formula. It's not developed or explicitly stated, but if we look for it, we'll find it. Peace comes from God through Christ, and the love of God is poured out through the Holy Spirit. For Paul, the gift of the Spirit is evidence that the community already lives in the age to come. God already reigns, we simply need to recognize that reign.

In John's Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples that there is more to be shared, but they're not yet ready to hear it or understand it. It takes time and experience to begin to understand this God who comes to us as Trinity, as divine complexity. The Trinity at its heart, is our best yet inadequate attempt to capture in words the mysterious nature of God. It says something about both the unity and diversity of God's work and manifestation, as well as the importance of community to God and all whom God has created and loved.

For the Trinity to be of value for our faith experience, it must be more than a philosophical ideology. There has to be a living engagement with the Triune God. God is not simple. God is complex and ultimately too great for words. The Trinitarian God is constantly dancing, growing, choosing, and changing. We see this vision of the divine present in Proverbs where Wisdom is seen in feminine form, reminding us that in divine nature there is the feminine as well as the masculine. Proverbs suggests that Wisdom is the first Act of Creation, and then is the partner with God in creating the world, serving with God as "master worker," or perhaps better the "master builder." God sets out the plans and Wisdom brings the plan to fruition.

Over time, humans have developed a fuller and more coherent understanding of God, moving from early animism, through polytheism, henotheism (belief and worship of a single god, while accepting the existence or possible existence of other deities that may be worshipped), and on to monotheism. So, our own understandings do evolve. Because we can't handle the entire truth all at once, we build, layer by layer understandings of God. Some beliefs will be tossed aside, as they prove to be dead-ends, as we seek to better understand that which we have come to believe.

In John's gospel, Jesus says to the disciples, "I have much more to say to you, but you can't handle it now." At that point, Jesus is pointing toward the cross and the resurrection. He is telling them that even if they don't understand now, they will in time.

In this Trinitarian vision, we hear a promise; the Spirit of Truth is coming, and it will guide us to the truth. The Trinitarian element is apparent when Jesus says: “everything that the Father has is Mine,” continuing the message that the Father and Son are one. Then Jesus declares that the Spirit takes what is Christ’s and proclaims it to us. And here is the promise; the Spirit makes that which is Christ’s available to us. In order that we don’t fall victim to a theology of glory that leads to excessive jubilation, we need to understand that with any glory comes the suffering of the cross. That is the way of God who comes to us as Trinity.

As we consider the vision expressed in Proverbs, are we ready to experience the delight of God? To embrace a Wisdom that seeks to have fun, who smiles before God, who frolics with the inhabited earth and who delights in the human family? Are we ready to dance before God? Is our joy in our embrace of this God who comes to us inviting us to join in the dance of Trinity? What does your Trinity dance look like? What happens when your creating or imagining, your doing, and your praying all come together at the same time? What might that dance look like? Perhaps that dance can help us live into the reality of John’s celebrated verse: For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. May we all come to love a triune God who loves us and saves us in the ways only a complex and diverse God can.