

Spirit of Truth

Trinity Sunday

May 26, 2013

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- John 16:12-15

In addition to the lectionary texts we've heard this morning, I'd also like to read the passage from scripture that explains the doctrine of the Trinity - One God in three distinct persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - One Triune God...I'd like to read that scripture passage, except, of course, there isn't one. The word Trinity or term Triune God - those don't appear at all in the Bible - certainly the ideas are there the Trinitarian understanding of God emerges from Scripture as God is revealed there. But the doctrine of the Trinity is often a challenging belief to explain and to understand. In fact, I saw a post on Facebook this week - and this may be the 1st time I've used an example from Facebook in a sermon! - there was a picture of an adorable kitten, and the caption said: 'how a preacher can avoid problems on Trinity Sunday - don't say anything and just show pictures of kittens instead.'

Well, no kitten pictures from me today, but you may have noticed the insert in your bulletin with 'a trinity of poems', which is my attempt at saying something a bit differently for Trinity Sunday. But before we get to those poems, I'd like to set the stage a bit - so here's what I've been thinking - the Trinity is often spoken of as a doctrine - a particular belief - so a Christian doctrine is established, explained, as a statement of truth.

Doctrine is good – important – but also at times rightfully characterized as unappealingly stiff and dry. So instead I've been pondering the Trinity not as doctrine, but simply as relationship – dynamic relationship within God and with God...it is in relationship that we understand and experience Trinity. And so to say that the Trinity is true also requires a different idea of truth – which is that it is in relationship that we are opened to and receive truth – truth not as a set of facts, but truth as a relationship that opens the way for faith.

The truth of the Trinity found in relationship - look at Romans 5. As we hear there of the persons of God, God the Father, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, what we hear throughout are expressions of our relationship with God: 'peace with God through Christ' – a relationship of reconciliation; 'abiding in hope' – 'grace through all circumstances' – a relationship of presence 'God's love to us through the Holy Spirit' – a relationship of care. We experience the truth of who the Triune God is in relationship with God.

And then in the gospel of John, we see a relationship within God – Son, Spirit and Father sharing all things, giving and receiving within the fullness of God...and this relationship shared within God overflows to Jesus' followers in truth given to sustain and guide – truth meant to be received not in the abstract, but in the relationship of giving and receiving with God and one another. Truth and relationship inseparable – two sides of the same coin – the coin named faith.

It is in that spirit of truth and relationship together that I'd like to offer in these poems – to hear them as a way to experience, ponder, feel

something of how the Triune God we worship is revealed to us in life – a poem as a way of feeling truth and relationship woven together into a faith that lives and moves within us in sustaining ways.

So I'd like you to ponder first what it means to know God as Father – as Creator – as Mother – as Source...the first person of the Trinity - and listen as I read this poem by Mary Oliver. You can follow along or close your eyes and listen...and as you listen, I invite you to ponder not so much 'what does it mean?' but more 'how does it feel?' ...

The Place I Want to Get Back To

*is where
in the pinewoods
in the moments between
the darkness*

*and first light
two deer
came walking down the hill
and when they saw me*

*they said to each other, okay,
this one is okay,
let's see who she is
and why she is sitting*

*on the ground, like that,
so quiet, as if
asleep, or in a dream,
but, anyway, harmless;*

*and so they came
on their slender legs
and gazed upon me
not unlike the way*

*I go out to the dunes and look
and look and look
into the faces of the flowers;
and then one of them leaned forward*

*and nuzzled my hand,
and what can my life
bring me that could exceed
that brief moment?
For twenty years*

*I have gone every day
to the same woods,
not waiting, exactly, just lingering.
Such gifts, bestowed,
can't be repeated.*

*If you want to talk about this
come to visit. I live in the house
near the corner, which I have named
Gratitude.*

~ Mary Oliver ~ from Thirst

I wonder if you share any of this feeling: wonder at the miracle of creation – that there is an is; the presence of beauty; moments that are good; to be opened to mystery; to realize life is a gift; to feel gratitude at the center. When I feel those things, then I believe I am feeling the truth of who God is as Creator; when I feel those things I feel a relationship

with the divine Father who has made me and all things; and I feel grateful
– faith as a place called Gratitude.

I'd like you to ponder what it means to know God as Son – Jesus Christ –
Redeemer - as Savior...the second person of the Trinity, and as you do
listen to this poem by Naomi Shihab Nye:

Kindness - Naomi Shihab Nye

*Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,*

*feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.*

*What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know*

*how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.*

*How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.*

*Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.*

*You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.*

*Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.*

*You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice*

*catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.*

*Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and
purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
it is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.*

from The Words Under the Words: Selected Poems

I wonder if you share any of this feeling: the broken tenderness of life; the presence of healing and hope in life; the connection of my life to all; the day to day plod of life; the yearning in me that only kindness can meet; my need for love, tenderness, grace; the deep joy of receiving a presence who is healing, who is hope. When I feel those things, then I believe I am feeling the truth of who God is as Son – Jesus Christ - Savior; when I feel those things I feel a relationship with the divine Christ who is new life; I receive the kindness, the grace of God – and I feel faith as hope.

I'd like you to ponder what it means to know God as Spirit – Holy Spirit – Sustainer...the third person of the Trinity, and listen as I read this poem by Jane Hirshfield:

The Door - Jane Hirshfield from The October Palace

*A note waterfalls steadily
through us,
just below hearing.*

*Or this early light
streaming through dusty glass:
what enters, enters like that,
unstoppable gift.*

*And yet there is also the other,
the breath-space held between any call
and its answer--*

*In the querying
first scuff of footstep,
the wood owls' repeating,
the two-counting heart:*

*A little sabbath,
minnow whose brightness silvers past time.*

*The rest-note,
unwritten,
hinged between worlds,
that precedes change and allows it.*

I wonder if you share any of this feeling: the still presence of holiness; the quiet persistence of possibility; the mystery of calling; the breath, the breeze, of renewal. When I feel those things, then I believe I am feeling the truth of who God is as Spirit, Giver; when I feel those things I feel a relationship with the divine Holy Spirit who is presence and peace, gifting and calling; I feel God's presence – and I feel joy.

That's it – that's what I want to share today about the doctrine of the Trinity. In John, Jesus says to his disciples that there is much more he will reveal to them - which I think means that in all that his followers would encounter, the truth revealed is the Triune God whose fullness embraces our every circumstance – the truth of a relationship with God the Father, Son, Spirit that feels like these poems: beauty and gratitude, brokenness and grace, presence and calling and joy. One Triune God speaking true life into the poem that is my life, your life, all life. Thanks be to God.
AMEN.