

I speak to you in the name of our Creator, Christ the light of the world and the Holy Spirit, giver of wisdom and illumination. AMEN.

Trinity Sunday, the only feast day dedicated to a doctrine which is never mentioned by name in Scripture. Our texts today do nothing to explain it to us. Not individually anyway, they have to be taken all together to see how the threads weave the tapestry of the Trinity.

The reading from Proverbs seems particularly puzzling unless you have the secret decoder ring which reveals that Wisdom here is read as the Holy Spirit by most Jewish and Christian theologians. The Holy Spirit is revealed as a co-creator with God.

*then I was beside him, like a master worker, and I was daily his delight,
playing before him always, playing in his inhabited world and delighting in
the human race.*

Please don't miss the other super important message in these verses. God and the Holy Spirit delight in us!!

In our Psalm today God is worshiped as the creator all things. This time no one else is mentioned.

In Romans, Paul does link the three, God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, together, but it is more of an allusion, nothing concrete.

...we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

and

*God's love has been poured into our hearts **through** the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.*

And in our Gospel this morning, John does the same thing. Jesus promises the Spirit of Truth, which is one of the Gospel's names for the Holy Spirit, the other is the *Paraclete* which is often translated as Advocate, Comforter or Counselor. And he claims that all that the Father has, is his. More hints and allusions, but nothing concrete.

I can trace back the moment my biblical world broke open for me. It was 41 years ago in a little Pentecostal Church during adult Sunday School before the service. We were very fortunate to have a scholar as our pastor, Dr. Ron Kydd who taught at Bible Colleges before becoming our pastor and teaching at Tyndale University afterwards. Ron had just made the statement that the doctrine of the Trinity is not found explicitly in scripture. I was shocked and immediately replied, yes, it is, in 1 John 5:7.

For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.

Ron just smiled and informed me that the line was inserted **into** the text much later. Only very late manuscripts have the line. It is not found in **any** Greek manuscript before the fourteenth century. This is why if you look in your NRSV or NIV bibles, you won't find it. These translations use the earliest Greek texts. It's still in the New King James though. If you want to know more about that, ask me at coffeetime.

Back to my story. Honestly, you could have knocked me over with a feather. In that moment I felt like I was on the edge of freedom. It felt like all my questions had just been validated. I was overjoyed. This is when my lifetime of studying scripture and theology really started, even if I didn't have access to much of the knowledge until 30 years later. By the way, not for nothing, but Ron became an Anglican priest a few years after this.

So, from a rather young age I had lost the certainty of the Trinity. I was pretty sure it was an actual thing, but couldn't in anyway articulate it or text proof it. Sure, I heard many a preacher tying themselves up in pretzel knots trying to explain it, or perhaps worse, use some very lame analogy or metaphor like the three parts of an egg, shell, white, and yolk. Somehow, they just sounded hollow.

I experienced the same reaction in my first systematic theology course at Vancouver School of Theology. The first few classes were all about a bunch of white European men defending the existence of God. I don't think God needs our defence and I had no patience for it. I decided right then I would write a book called Unsystematic Theology. I haven't gotten around to that yet, but it's still percolating. I'm not interested in philosophical arguments; I want to talk about our experience of God. For me theology is all about how we experience God.

And that's exactly what was happening for the Christians in the first few centuries. The first followers of Jesus had seen wondrous miracles where people were healed, the hungry were fed and those oppressed by unclean spirits set free. After the resurrection of Jesus and the Day of Pentecost, the followers of Jesus were asking themselves questions like:

- What does it mean that God came to be with us, Emmanuel **in** Jesus?

- What does it mean that Jesus and the Father are one?
- What does it mean that we are baptised, cleansed, and sanctified in the Holy Spirit, and we received that Spirit into our actual human bodies?

The first record we have of the word Trinity used to describe God was in the late 2nd century by Theophilus of Antioch. He defines the Trinity as God, his Word (*Logos*) and his Wisdom (*Sophia*).¹

Through the later writings of the Hebrew Scriptures and into the second Temple period, there is already a growing understanding of the Holy Spirit as something more than an extension of the Creator God. The Spirit of God is referred to as Sophia, Wisdom in our reading from Proverbs this morning. Did you notice that Wisdom is referred to with feminine pronouns and she co-created the world with God.

⁸ *Does not wisdom call and understanding raise her voice?*

²⁷ *When he established the heavens, I was there;
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,*

²⁸ *when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,*

²⁹ *when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,*

when he marked out the foundations of the earth,

³⁰ *then I was beside him, like a master worker.*

¹ Theophilus, *Apologia ad Autolyicum*, Book II, Chapter 15

The story of creation in Genesis 1 tells us that,

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And as Philip preached last Sunday the Hebrew word *ruach* is a multivalent word. That's a fancy way of saying that it can mean a numbers of things, like breath, wind, and spirit. The same is true for the Greek word *pneuma*. Breath is such an amazing way to think of the Spirit, as it is her breath which gives us life, as we read in Genesis 2:7 *"then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."* That same Spirit was breathed into the disciples in the Gospel of John: Jesus *"breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."* How marvellous is it that the spirit is breathed into humanity at creation and into the disciples as Jesus is about to ascend?

Luke's Gospel tells us that before John the Baptist was even born, he was filled with the Holy Spirit and Jesus himself was conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit. When John the Baptist proclaims that another will come after him who will baptise in water and Spirit, his audience seems to understand what he means. That's because they know Ezekiel 36:

²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ A new heart I will give you, and a new Spirit I will put within you, and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ I will put my

Spirit within you and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances.”

So already the people of God were grappling with this idea that somehow God and his Holy Spirit were not exactly the same thing and **yet** they were one. The Holy Spirit has an **agency** of her own. For the Jews, this would be a very challenging idea as their whole identity was founded on being the people of the one and only true God. “Hear O Israel the Lord your God, the Lord in One.” So it is fascinating to see these glimpses of an evolving understanding of God.

When John wrote the prologue of his Gospel, he expected that his readers and listeners would make the connection with Genesis 1 and Proverbs 8.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

Notice that here it is Christ who is co-creating with God in the beginning. All three have a role in creation.

In the first chapter of the letter to the Colossians we read,

*¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, ¹⁶ for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—**all** things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

And finally, the great commission in Matthew 28 reflects this growing understanding of the three who are one,

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

However, this does not name these three as one identity, nor is the Trinity mentioned. This is the core of the matter. Although the three are named, they are not named as three persons of one God. It is implied, but not explicit. So, even though there is no explicit scripture we can point to for solid evidence of the doctrine of the Trinity, there are many places such as the ones I've shared this morning, and many more which early followers of Jesus turned to make sense of their experience of the Divine. This wasn't an intellectual exercise, especially for those in the first century. It was firmly rooted in their **experience** of God. God the Father of Jesus and themselves. Jesus, who they broke bread with and wandered the Galilee and Judea healing the sick, feeding the hungry and setting free the oppressed. The one they watch die, and then rise from the dead, and then ascend! And the Spirit who descended on Jesus at his Baptism. Who empowered Jesus and themselves to work miracles! The Spirit who descended on them on the Day of Pentecost with tongues of fire and the incredible ability to speak in other languages! The Spirit who sanctified and transformed them so that they could follow the way of the Lord just as Ezekiel promised.

Somehow in ways that escape articulation and explanation, God is experienced in these three, the same and yet different. I am content to leave the mystery as mystery. For God is so much more than we can ever comprehend. I marvel at this expansive God we can not put in a box or pin on a specimen board

with all the parts carefully labelled. I rejoice in a Divine who continually surprises me as we journey together. I rest in a God who is far beyond me, yet created me, calls me beloved and delights in me.

Richard Rohr refers to the Trinity as the Divine Dance and describes it as a relationship where one flows in and out of each other. A relationship which we are invited to take part in. So, on this Trinity Sunday, I invite you to put aside the questions of how three can be one, and instead reflect on the ways you have experienced God the Creator, Jesus the Word of Life, and the Holy Spirit who is Wisdom and transforms our lives. Enter into their relationship, and know that they delight in you!

AMEN.