

“Does not wisdom call...”
A Sermon for the Federated Church of Thomaston
Thomaston, Maine
Sunday, June 16, 2019
Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Scripture: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?
On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand;
beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out:
“To you, O People, I call, and my cry is to all that live.

The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago.
Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth –
when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world’s first bits of soil.
When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
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,
then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.
Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Will you pray with me. O wise and compassionate God, WHEN will we get your message and not let it go? WHEN will we hear you, see you, feel you, know you and remember that before we were born, your wisdom lived and that after we’re long gone, your wisdom will march on. Help us catch a glimpse of your wisdom – all that is good and right in your creation – this day, O God. Amen.

I’m going to say a word, and when I say it, I want you to call to mind someone whom you believe the word describes. Ready? The word is “wise.” Take a moment to call to mind someone you believe is wise. (pause) Without revealing who the person is, tell us, in a word or in a phrase, what makes that person wise in your mind’s eye. (get responses)

For me, the wise person is the one who listens more and talks less.

The wise person is the one who looks not only *at* me but *into* me when we are together.

The wise person is the one who can see both sides of an argument and speak respectfully, if not in agreement, with both sides.

The wise person is the one who reserves judgment about another person or an issue until they can assess as fully as possible all aspects of the person or the issue.

The wise person is the one who believes strength lies in finding harmony in diversity and weakness lies in trying to convert others to uniformity.

For me, the wise person remembers the past and learns from it; lives the present and relishes each moment; and looks to the future with hope in the midst of a hope-starved world.

Today is Trinity Sunday in the Christian calendar. Its significance comes from the past and we can learn from it. Today is the first day of the rest of our lives and the concept of the Trinity can give us hope in the midst of a hope-starved world..

Trinity Sunday is an important Sunday, – but probably more so for our Catholic and Episcopalian brothers and sisters than for us in this congregation. “Trinity Sunday, officially ‘The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity,’ is one of the few feasts of the Christian Year that celebrates a *reality* and *doctrine* rather than an *event* or *person*.

On Trinity Sunday we remember and honor the eternal God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Trinity Sunday is celebrated the Sunday after Pentecost, and lasts only one day, which is symbolic of the *unity* of the Trinity. The Eastern Churches [Greek and Russian Orthodox] have no tradition of Trinity Sunday, arguing that they celebrate the Trinity every Sunday. Westerners do as well, although they set aside a special feast day for the purpose.”¹ There's your brief historical lesson about the *doctrine* of the Trinity!

The *concept* of the Trinity has been somewhat of a stumbling block for me. When I had written the first draft of my ordination paper back in 1998, one of the ministers on the Church and Ministry Committee that would say yea or nay to my becoming ordained, asked me this question: “Susan, why didn’t you go ‘uu,’ (meaning Unitarian Universalist)?” I told her I would be happy to answer the question, but that I was curious why she asked. She responded, “I don’t read anything of the Trinity in your paper.” I reiterated to her and the committee again that I had not grown up in the church, and Trinitarian language just didn’t roll off my tongue very easily. She asked me to write another draft of my ordination paper and include something about my understanding and acceptance of the Trinity as a Christian.

In preparing for today, I reread my ordination paper and noted that I had tweaked it enough so that the members of my committee were convinced I was, indeed, a Trinitarian, and therefore could proceed to ordination in the Christian faith.

I won’t bore you with what I wrote in my ordination paper about the doctrine of the Trinity, but I do have it in the written copy of this sermon, if you're interested in reading it!

[Here’s a bit of what I said in my ordination paper: “As Christians, we are in relation to God through our relation with Jesus Christ, both human and divine, by way of the on-going relation we have with the Holy Spirit sent by Christ.

This is an *active* way of relating because we accept Jesus’ actions during his lifetime as representative of how *we* are supposed to relate to one another in our lifetimes.

This is an active way of relating because we accept Jesus’ divinity as the Christ, both before and after death, as *our* Savior and Promise of life everlasting. The constant action of the Holy Spirit in our lives, whether we recognize that action or not, is the ‘proof,’ or rather the confirmation, of the promise and power of Christ who acts for us, as Christians, in our constant quest for relation with God.

The Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ begins, ‘We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God, and to your deeds we

¹David Bennett, www.churchyear.net/trinitysunday.html

testify.’ [I responded in my ordination paper], the *deeds* of God are detailed in Scripture. An explicit *doctrine* of the Trinity is not.

It is in Scripture that we learn most directly of the importance of *relationship* for faith. It is in faith that we accept both the historical *and* sacred significance of Scripture and the doctrine of the Trinity as it was developed by the early church. What Scripture tells us of the *activity* of God is the source of our Trinitarian faith as Christians. What *matters* is the on-going relevance of the direction and teachings of Scripture for our lives as Christians. Our Trinitarian understanding of God is active through our faith as we relate to one another with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I believe it is important not to lose sight of the mystery of God’s actions in the world and God’s relationship with us all.”^{2]}

A more interesting and, to me, more helpful way to understand the Trinity comes from the thinking of Presbyterian minister and theologian Frederick Buechner. He writes, "The much-maligned doctrine of the Trinity is an assertion that, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, there is only one God.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit mean that the mystery *beyond* us, the mystery *among* us, and the mystery *within* us are all the same mystery. Thus the Trinity is a way of saying something about us and the way we experience God....

If the idea of God as both Three and One seems farfetched and obfuscating [confusing], look in the mirror someday. There is (a) the *interior life* known only to yourself and those you choose to communicate it to (the Father). There is (b) the *visible face*, which in some measure reflects that inner life (the Son). And there is (c) the *invisible power* you have which enables you to communicate that interior life in such a way that others do not merely know *about* it, but know it in the sense of its becoming part of who they are (the Holy Spirit). Yet what you are looking at in the mirror is clearly and indivisibly the one and only you.”³

In other words, only God sees you inside, Jesus sees you outside and inside, and the Holy Spirit sees how you live in relation to all others like you.

We sing of the Trinity each Sunday in the *Gloria Patri* and in the *Doxology* after we take our offering. I baptize infants and adults “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” I can do all of that in confidence and in good ordained order because I accept the concept of the Trinity as a *mystery* which I don’t have to fully comprehend intellectually to faithfully accept spiritually.

There's another commentary about the Trinity that helped me with my understanding of the Trinity as I reflected about it this week. I thought it might help some of you, too. It goes, “The Trinity is one of the most fascinating – and controversial – Christian dogmas. The Trinity is a mystery. By mystery the Church does not mean a riddle, but rather the Trinity is a reality above our human comprehension that we may begin to grasp, but ultimately must know through worship, symbol, and faith. It has been said that mystery is not a wall to run up against, but an ocean in which to swim....

²Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet, “An Ordination Paper,” September 10, 1999, p. 2-3.

³Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking, A Seeker's ABC*, revised and expanded, New York: HarperCollins, 1973, 1993, p. 114.

[David Bennett goes on to say] an illustration to explain the Trinity is the musical chord. Think of a C-chord. The C, E, and G notes are all distinct notes, but joined together as one chord the sound is richer and more dynamic than had the notes been played individually. The chords are all equally important in producing the rich sound, and the sound is lacking and thin if one of the notes is left out.”⁴

In the Christian faith, if we leave out God as Father or Creator, or Jesus as Son or Redeemer, or the Holy Spirit as Guide or Sustainer, we lose the richness of the whole holy package which brings us to church each Sunday.

If I envision mystery as an ocean in which to swim... a musical chord of three notes richly drawn together... I can more easily envision and make sense of those ways of understanding and appreciating the Trinity. Can you?

They speak to me of ways of grasping, too, the wisdom of God which is described in the passage from Proverbs which we heard earlier. Even though the wisdom of God has called to us since the beginning of time, appearing in many forms and through many voices, we often don't take heed or understand how that wisdom works in our individual lives.

Yet as one Baptist pastor has written, “Wisdom speaks to everyone, and every one of us has a piece of Wisdom in our souls, if we just pay close enough attention. Do we pay enough attention to the wisdom we have around us? How do we recognize wisdom? Does the wise one have wisdom based upon experience, or education, or a combination of both? What about the wisdom of a child? Might it be more pure than the wisdom of an older ‘sage’?”⁵

Today is Trinity Sunday, the day on which we remember the important chord of Father, Son and Holy Spirit for the Christian faith. Today is the first day of the rest of our lives, on which we have choices to make about how we shall spend it and the days to come.

Does not wisdom, in all her mystery, call us and take her stand beside us this day? In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, let the people say, “Amen.”

⁴David Bennett, www.churchyear.net/trinitysunday.html

⁵Douglas M. Donley, quoted in *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 3*, David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, editors, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, p. 28.