

First Presbyterian Church

Cheyenne, Wyoming

May 30, 2010

Worship Theme: The Mystery of the Trinity

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Romans 5: 1-5

John 16:12-15

Last Sunday we just completed a book study, “Life of the Beloved”, a little spiritual classic written by the late Father Henri J.M. Nouwen, who was a Roman Catholic priest, originally from Holland. This little book was very stimulating, and led to many fascinating conversations and observations from the class, which averaged about 16 people for seven consecutive weeks. Little did I realize that this class and this book would provide the perfect opening sermon illustration for today’s worship theme: The mystery of the Trinity. So here it is: When the group gathered for the first time on April 11th, I was introducing the book and the study. One of the brighter members of the group, with a mischievous smile commented as follows: “Let’s see, a book written by a Catholic, studied in the Presbyterian church, and moderated by a Lutheran...what’s wrong with this

picture.?” My immediate response was: “This is the new Trinity!”

Actually, we’re not always sure how best to celebrate the festival of the Holy Trinity, because like many matters of faith, it is indeed a mystery. Indeed, life is a journey in which we catch glimpses of the Divine mystery that is always around and within us, if we but take the time to pay attention and notice.

In fact, the word God in Greek is Theos. From this Greek word, Theos, comes what we call the study of Theology, which for all practical purposes, means “faith seeking understanding.” These two words, “faith”, and “understanding” are the foundations of what we do in our efforts to grow together in our faith.

The very essence of our understanding of the Christian faith is embedded in the ancient declaration of the earliest group of Christian believers is that God has revealed God’s own self in three “persons” Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When we speak of these “persons” as “one in three and three in one” we end up with the puzzling notion of a God that is more mysterious than ever. Yet it’s in the very mystery of the Trinity that God

remains fully God. In a way our experience with God is much the same as that of Moses, who wanted to see God's face. God's answer, you may remember, was something to the effect of "I will hide my face from you as I pass by and you shall only see my back, lest you only see my back..lest you gaze upon me and die."

Actually, it's alright to live in the mystery of God's presence. In fact, you just might find out that this mysterious God, as the Spirit of truth, has entered your life in more ways than you ever imagined...guiding and leading you into the truth.

Our Bible lessons for today give us a sampling of the scriptural basis for the doctrine of the Trinity. Our reading from Proverbs introduces Wisdom as both part of the ordering of the created universe and its delight.

One of the neat surprises in the reading from Proverbs is that Wisdom is a feminine presence. You have the usual male image of God as the creator. But then, the female image shows up in verse 1: "Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise HER voice." ...later in verses 27-31, "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” etc...etc..and finishing with these words...”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.” Here we have the female influence as equal and necessary. Feminism is not a new concept. Here we have it in Proverbs! So even the male dominated language of the Old Testament where God is always identified as masculine, there is the feminine side of the Creator as a part of the activity of God.

Turning to the New Testament, which testifies to Jesus, the second “person” of the Trinity, our Epistle lesson from Paul celebrates the peace that is God’s gift through Christ. God has acted to proved the right relationship to all who trust in God’s promises. This certainty grounds us in our faith that Christ brings to life. We can even boast in this hope. But the real surprise in this lesson is that, with this gift of Christ’s peace, we may even boast in our sufferings. Our experience of suffering makes us stronger, not weaker, and nurtures hope within us that is indeed, Christ, the second person in the Trinity, at work

in us. Think of those times when you have experienced suffering, or sabotage. The older you are, the more you can relate to these times of life. It's always devastating and the tendency is to want revenge on that one who has sinned against you. But, remember in the Lord's prayer, we are to forgive those who sin against us. But more importantly than that, Paul assures us that even in our suffering, God is present. Jesus is our model of suffering that can be redemptive. Those who suffer for what they believe do not suffer in vain. So if and when you are going through a time of betrayal, be it a co worker, a spouse, or a friend, know that you do not walk alone. Martin Luther said it this way: "Faith is the darkness where Christ lives."

Finally we get to the third "person" of the Trinity. This is the most mysterious of all, because it is not really a "person" at all, but real nonetheless. In the farewell message of Jesus from our Gospel reading, Jesus speaks of the Spirit, or Paraclete, as an advocate that keeps the spirit and the faith of a community going when the going gets tough, and even mysterious. Because in the midst of what may seem to be utter confusion and chaos, there is

the Spirit guiding, leading, speaking, inspiring. One scholar puts it this way: “The choice of the word paraclete seems to lean toward the gift of a strong and multifaceted God available to us as individuals and in our faith communities at all times, but especially in times of trial and confusion.”

Think of it this way: the more chaos you are in is all the more a chance for the Holy Spirit to enter in. The Spirit is there, not because I say so, but because Jesus says so. And Jesus came from the Father, and is accessed through the Holy Spirit, so there you have it.

Sometimes I like to use, in place of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the words Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.

At least all of what I have been saying is a call to look beyond ourselves, and within ourselves, to identify God at work. Or, as one source put it: “Instead of the triune, self-giving God at the center of our lives, too often the god we idolize and adore as the real point of our worship is often the all too familiar, self centered trinity known as “me, myself, and I.”

C.S. Lewis, that famous British atheist turned believer once said that the most frequently spoken word in heaven would be “OH.” As in, “Oh, now I understand.” Or, “Oh, now I see what God’s plan was.” Or, “Oh, now I see the reason for the trial I went through.”

For in the final analysis, we walk by faith, not by knowledge. The experience of the Trinity is not the same as memorizing any doctrine. But one day we will understand, even as we have been fully understood.

We will never completely understand the Trinity. What is important is to remember what St. Paul says in II Timothy Chapter 1, verses 11, 12, and 14

“For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him...Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.”

Amen...and Amen..

