



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

MAY 22, 2016
TRINITY SUNDAY

Here All the Time
Romans 5:1-5; Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

I always get a little nostalgic at this time of year as high school and college graduations take place. I think of young people beginning to take their place in the world and of all that waits for them. I think back to my own graduation from high school on that warm Monday evening late in the month of May. My, how far I have traveled over the years!

I distinctly remember about five months earlier, as I approached my eighteenth birthday, thinking how wonderful it would be to finally be an adult (which legally happened at eighteen back in the last century). I imagined what it would be like to finish school, leave home, launch my career, vote, and no longer be considered a child. I fantasized about not having to answer to my parents about every thing I did and about how my parents would no longer have to worry about me as they had during my childhood. I was ready and eager to be an adult.

Now, four decades later, I realize that neither a particular age nor a diploma signals a point in life when you have all of the experience and insight you will need for the day to come. We never reach a stage of understanding when there is nothing else for us to learn. As much as I hate to admit it, there are days when I wish my parents were here to handle some of the adult issues that come streaming by. I cherish the privilege of voting, but, honestly, voting responsibly is much tougher these days in light of our incendiary political environment. And I have learned that my parents worry about me more today than they ever did when I was growing up because there is more at stake with who I am and what I do. Four decades later, I am delighted that I am and always will be my parents' child.

Perhaps these realizations alone point to the fact that they did their job well in getting me to adulthood. Often parents can hope for little more than that their children will pay attention to what they have been taught and make wise choices as they venture out on their own.

I suspect it is no different with our relationship with God. When I was baptized at age ten, I thought I had arrived at a "godly graduation." I came out of that water along with my friends, committed to Christ, washed clean of

my sins, and determined to be good the rest of my life. Then I woke up the next morning Have you ever wondered if God prays to himself that we will turn out alright?!

I think about what Jesus told his disciples just before his crucifixion. He had spent three years teaching them by word and example. The supper in that upper room was, in some sense, their baccalaureate. It was his blessing on them before they ventured out on their own with the Gospel. He said,

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. John 16:12-15

As we all eventually realize, graduation, or even a certain age in life, does not mean that we have learned all that we can or all that we need. Each demarcation point in life basically reminds us of the fact that we have prepared ourselves simply to learn more. That is what Jesus told his disciples: "There is a lot more I want to tell you, but you are not ready. So I will send the Spirit--another Teacher, a Guide, a Fellow Traveler--who will teach you these things."

Given the difficulty that the disciples often had in understanding some of the things Jesus said and did, it comes as no surprise that he might want his three years of teaching to sink in a bit before tossing anything else their way. Yet, I don't think that is at all why he promised to send the Spirit to continue to teach them. After all, as Tony Cartledge reminds us,

A parent would not sit down with a six-year-old and explain what he or she should watch out for as a teenager: the child could not begin to understand the upcoming stresses of puberty, peer pressure, and emerging self-identity. Nor would one advise an adolescent on marital, financial, or career issues he or she would not face for a decade or more.

Neither would it have been helpful for Jesus to speak of matters relative to the establishment of the first church communities, the need for structure, or strategies for dealing with those who opposed their efforts: those things were still beyond them.

But the disciples would not be left alone when those issues did arise, for Jesus and the Father would send the Spirit to encourage, comfort, and continue to instruct them. “When the Spirit of truth comes,” Jesus said, “he will guide you into all the truth” (v. 13a). As new issues arose, the Spirit would prompt them in helpful ways, reminding them of what Jesus had already taught, or revealing new insights.¹

Jesus promised the Spirit to the disciples—and to us—precisely because we never stop learning and we never stop needing a fresh perspective on the world God has given to us. The Spirit has come to walk with us along whatever paths we choose or are forced to take.

It becomes clearer why the Book of Proverbs includes numerous sections on Wisdom and why, in the passage we read earlier, Wisdom is personified, given a voice and a purpose. Wisdom is understood to have been around a while, since the beginning to be specific, and was intricately involved in every aspect of creation. I love the imagery of God the grand architect and Wisdom the master builder collaborating and laboring together to fashion our world just right. It is the last verse in that passage that captures my attention, however. After explaining her role in partnership with the Creator, Wisdom gushes, “I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race” (Proverbs 8:30-31). As Sally Field might say, “God likes us, right now, God really likes us!”

Because God likes us—loves us—God has continually sought to communicate with us and relate to us throughout history. For the Hebrew people, God sought to establish a relationship as Heavenly Father, the Creator who cares for his creation, a Parent who watches over his children. When that relationship alone did not win the fidelity of his people, God sought to relate as one of us, coming in the form of Jesus, fully human yet fully divine. He experienced everything we do—all of the growing pains, the joys, the sorrows, and the struggles of living. When it was time for Jesus the Son and Brother to depart, he promised a companion, the Spirit, who would remain with us. Because of these various ways of experiencing God, believers established the doctrine of the Trinity in order to better understand our God whose ultimate desire is to be in relationship with us.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not stated as such in scripture. The term itself is not used. Throughout scripture, however, there are many references

¹Tony Cartledge, “Trinitarian Roots,” *Nurturing Faith Bible Studies* (May 22, 2016); available online at: <https://baptiststoday.org/free-lesson-for-may-22-2016/>.

to God as Father, Son, and Spirit. God as Father was a novel idea in the ancient world. Jesus is identified by John as the Word who was in the beginning with God and a partner in creation. Proverbs speaks of Wisdom as the Master Builder and tutor-for-life who instructs us in what we need to know for the day at hand. Jesus calls the Spirit "the Paraclete," the companion who will journey beside us all along the way.

One need not think very hard to realize how desperately we need God present as the Spirit these days. While Jesus taught a great deal about how we should relate to one another, he never dealt with some of the issues that are before us today. School districting issues did not exist in first century Palestine nor did decisions over which bathrooms should be used. His world knew nothing about gun laws or global warming or transgender issues, although he did have something to say about immigrants and greed and loving one another. The point is that we face issues Jesus and his disciples never considered . . . and Jesus knew we would. Since he would not be around in bodily form to speak to every new issue that would arise until the end of the age, he promised the Spirit who would help enlighten us about whatever presented itself. Reminding us of God's continual revelations and of Jesus' timeless teachings, the Spirit would help us sort through the challenges of the day. Personal, church, communal, and global insight are offered through the Spirit if we will but open ourselves to the presence of God.

Reflecting on Jesus' words to the disciples in that upper room, David Lose explains:

. . . Jesus promises that the Spirit will come and guide them into truth. That there are some things they simply can't bear yet. That they have more to learn. That the disciples – those who have spent so much time with Jesus – do not have all the answers. Because all of that means that the Christian community then – and now! – continues to be dependent. Dependent on the Spirit and dependent on each other, because the Spirit so often speaks to us through the person and words of those around us.²

God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit; Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer; Parent, Child, and Mentor -- however you want to characterize the ways in which we experience God, the important thing is that we do experience God. God meets us where we are and often it is in a challenging place. God understands that we learn and grow and are equipped for a certain time in life, then it becomes necessary to teach us something new, to

²David Lose, "Trinity C: Don't Mention the Trinity!" *In the Meantime* (May 17, 2016); available online at: <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/05/trinity-c-shh-don't-mention-the-trinity/>.

open our minds and hearts a little wider, until we gradually become more and more like Christ in the ways we think and act.

None of us has a monopoly on the truth. None of us knows the mind of God on all things. If we did, we would no longer need God, would we? Instead, God has set it up so that we need one another. You have insight and understanding and so do I. Together, through the wisdom of God's Spirit, we can come far closer to the truth than we ever can alone. We need one another because God's Spirit works in and through us. As we share our ideas, our concerns, our doubts, our fears, our needs, and our hopes, we share our faith and God speaks to us the wisdom that we need.

We face many difficult and perplexing issues today. We have different perspectives on what we should do and how the world should look, but in order to live faithfully, we have to work together to find solutions. As many of you did, I read an article in the newspaper about our brothers and sisters in the United Methodist Church who are struggling to find common understanding on issues of sexuality. As delegates met to determine the future of that denomination, someone proposed that the best solution would be to separate into three distinct communities of the Church: conservative, moderate, and progressive. Without the opposing views of the other two factions, each group would be at peace to carry on their ministry.

Fortunately, someone recognized the folly in such an approach. Generally, that is the solution we seek when discussion gets heated, feelings get bruised, and essential matters of faith are used as weapons against each other. God, however, seems to desire a different outcome. God seems to want us to work together, as difficult as it may be, to discover the truth and witness the strength of the Christian community. So Wisdom cries out: "To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live." Wisdom, our Counselor, calls out for us to listen, to learn, to grow.

We never have all the answers, but we know the One who does. Day by day, we seek the wisdom of our faith together and discover how to live faithfully in the world. We cannot do that alone. God has brought us this far and will not abandon us. We discover that the help we need for the living of these days has been here all along in the person of the Spirit, Wisdom of God, who will teach us what we need to know. Thanks be to God. Amen.

May 22, 2016

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Almighty and Everlasting God, you are architect and artist of this world of beauty and wonder, a world filled with good gifts to sustain our lives, to enrich our minds, to delight our senses, and to nurture our souls. You are the One who came to dwell among us and to offer yourself for us, that we might know freedom from sin and death and experience the abundant and joyful life which you intended for us. You are also the Sustainer of our lives in this and every moment, empowering us to love and equipping us to serve. All praise we give to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; our Creator, our Redeemer, our Friend.

Holy and Merciful God, from the moment of creation, you have given your Wisdom and Word to guide us. We are able to love because you first loved us. We can imagine a world where all your children live in peace and have enough because your Spirit inspires us to dream your dreams and to open our hearts and minds to your vision. You place within us gifts and talents which allow us to do the work of caring for your creation and for one another. You have promised us mercy that will never abandon us and a hope that will not disappoint through your abiding presence with us.

Give us eyes to see the beauty of your promises fulfilled around and within us each day. Give us ears to hear your voice and to respond to your call. Give us minds agile enough to imagine justice for those who have known oppression. Give us hands strong enough to accomplish your work. Give us feet courageous enough to follow you wherever your children need to know of the light and life you offer. Give us hearts open enough to extend hospitality to both friend and stranger, recognizing that in so doing, we welcome you into our midst. And in all circumstances, give us spirits bold and unwavering enough to believe that our worship here and the compassion we extend to those we meet outside these walls can make evident the fulfillment of our kingdom among us.

Creator God, who is creating still, create, redeem, sustain us now, we pray, to do your work and will. We pray in the name of the Christ who calls us and by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells with us. Amen.

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