



Lakeside Sermons

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

MAY 26, 2013
TRINITY SUNDAY

God at Work

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; John 16:12-15

Ah, Memorial Day weekend! Finally, after the long winter months, the delayed spring, the endless days of cool weather and ceaseless rain, it is finally summer—unofficially, of course. Technically summer does not begin until the summer solstice, which is still a little less than a month away. We all know, however, that as a practical matter summer begins on Memorial Day weekend when picnics, barbecues, and parades honoring our military men and women who gave their lives in service to our freedom commence. The beaches are full for the first week of business. The lakes are buzzing with all manner of watercraft. Backyard grills are fired up and bug spray fills the air. Ah, summertime!

It is purely coincidence that Memorial Day weekend occurs this year at the same time as Trinity Sunday, but there is some meaning in the coincidence. As a faith community, we, too, have come through long seasons of the soul. Back at the beginning of December we began preparing for the coming of Christ. We anticipated Jesus' arrival and celebrated his birth. Following Christmas we hailed his revelation to the world and the inclusion of all people in the Good News. Early in February we began that long journey of Lent, carefully following Jesus' life, watching his every move, listening intently to his words, working out the paradoxes of our faith. We winced when he was betrayed, wept when he died, and celebrated when he rose from the dead. For fifty days we saw him appear here and there, reassuring his disciples, offering final instructions, reminding them of his love. He ascended to the Father in heaven and the Holy Spirit blew over the disciples on Pentecost. Now most of the dramatic aspects of the Christian year are complete. We can breathe a sigh of relief, get out our spiritual lounge chairs, and relax in the warmth of God's gracious story. It is ordinary time, the "summertime" of the Christian year.

Lest we get careless and begin dozing too soon on our way to the "Christian coast," Trinity Sunday appears. You know the experience. You are cruising down Highway 64 headed to the Outer Banks or along Highway 43 on your way to Atlantic Beach or on Interstate 40 with Wilmington on the horizon and a sign suddenly appears. You are snapped away from your

daydreaming back to reality when you see the orange signs with black letters which proclaim, “Work Zone: Stay Alert.” There is nothing like a DOT road construction project to slow you down before you reach the beach. And in these parts, you are likely to find three or four work zones before you dip your toes into the Atlantic Ocean.

Trinity Sunday is like one of those signs for us. As we settle into the comfort of considering the day-to-day character of the Christian faith, Trinity Sunday reminds us that there is still something significant going on ahead. Just because Jesus has ascended, the Spirit has blown through, and the disciples are beginning to scatter does not mean that God is on hiatus. Stay alert because God is at work.

I like Trinity Sunday. Up to this point in the Christian year, we have focused on the individual dimensions of God’s personality. We think about God as our Heavenly Parent creating the world, shepherding the Israelites, fathering Jesus. We marvel at Jesus who comes into the world as we do, shares our lives, and invites us to share his life as well. We welcome the Holy Spirit which promises to remind us of all the things Jesus said and to reveal everything he did not have time to say. Over the past six months we have reviewed the amazing ways in which God revealed himself in the lives of his people as recorded in scripture.

The obvious purpose of Trinity Sunday is that it reminds us that we worship, not three separate gods, but one God. It is not surprising that non-Christians get confused when we insist that we worship one God then talk about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What we call the Doctrine of the Trinity is an experiential belief that seeks to identify God based on our experience with God as Father, Son, and Spirit or as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. The Bible does not identify God as Three-in-One, but scripture does stress the unity of God while detailing the ways in which God reveals Godself as Parent, as child, and as Spirit. If we ignore the various revelations of God, we miss understanding the wholeness of God.

Last week I attended our Preschool graduation. As the children came in, all parents and grandparents rose—not in celebration, but so they could take pictures of their precious little ones! As the children sang here on the chancel, I noticed the viewfinder on the video recorder of one of the grandfathers. He was zoomed in on his grandson, capturing every move and moment for posterity. I understood. We want to capture the important moments in our children’s lives. Nevertheless, as I watched the class of

children sing and clap and dance, I realized how much that camera lens was missing. In ten years when they bring out this video, they will see every movement and expression this handsome young man made, but they won't have any images of his friends. They won't see the love and enthusiasm of his teachers. They won't be able to identify the place. They won't have a full context for the experience that capped his three years of preschool here at Lakeside.

In the same way, if we focus exclusively on one aspect of God, we will miss seeing the larger picture of who God is and what God is about in the world. Trinity Sunday is a good opportunity to remind ourselves that God is One but interacts with us in various ways.

One of the other benefits of Trinity Sunday, however, is that it alerts us to the fact that God is still at work among us. Jesus repeatedly promised his followers that they would be "baptized by the Spirit" and that the Spirit would come and dwell with them after he was gone. In reality, the Spirit has been here the entire time as the Book of Proverbs reminds us. Listen carefully to this reading which talks about Wisdom (which we can identify as God's Spirit) and the role it plays in creation. Common to the time, Wisdom is personified as a woman, an image that adds even more depth to the idea of the Trinity.

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

I love this bit of literature because it tells a story from two dimensions. First it stands back and sees Wisdom (the Spirit of God) in all of the core places of life. There is Wisdom at the crossroads where commerce takes place. She is at the gates of the city where disputes and matters of justice are handled. Wisdom is also found in ordinary places like “up on the height” and “beside the way.” In other words, God’s Spirit of Wisdom is present wherever people are to be found. She demands attention, calls us to live rightly, and guides in the way we should go.¹

Although Jesus is no longer among us in the flesh as he was some 2000 years ago, as our choir reminded us earlier, “God is seen” everywhere in our lives. God is here in this sanctuary as well as in our homes. God is in the office, at the store, in the classroom, at the theater, in the grocery store, on the golf course, in the courtroom, the boardroom, the legislature, the mall, the city streets, and, yes, even at the beach. God is seen wherever we are if we will only look. God is here and at work among us and for us.

The second portion of this passage is delightful because Wisdom herself speaks. It is a nostalgic, grateful memory of her time with God at the beginning of creation. She remembers the way in which God built the earth, designing its features, measuring every angle, constructing each element, adding all the finishing touches. The passage concludes with a wonderful double image. Wisdom remembers,

¹Elizabeth Webb, “Commentary on Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31,” *Working Preacher* (May 26, 2013); available online at: http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1708.

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.

Depending on how the phrases are translated, the image here is either of a co-worker and apprentice working closely alongside God or of a delighted child helping her father in the workshop as he creates this masterpiece of a world.² Both images are appropriate for throughout scripture we understand that God as Father, Son, and Spirit shared in the creative work of bringing our world into being. The other image of an excited child reminds of us the delight God takes in his creation, especially in his crowning touch of humanity.

This passage from the Book of Proverbs highlights the fact that God carefully created our world and takes great delight in it. It also reminds us that God is still here and still at work. The creation is not complete for it continues to grow, to evolve, to manifest itself in different ways with different needs. God has not abandoned us, but is right in the center of our activity. God is seen wherever we are. God is seen when we look back at where we have been and how we made it through each challenge of life. God is seen beside us as we decide daily how to live our lives. And God is seen ahead, preparing the way, calling us to faithfulness, eagerly awaiting the unfolding of our lives. God is seen, if we will but look. God is at work and invites us to join him in his creative endeavors.

Whatever your plans for the summer or the rest of your life, remember that today is Trinity Sunday, a good time to be alert and see God at work in every aspect of our lives. Thanks be to God!

²Webb.

May 26, 2013

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Almighty and Everlasting God, you are the architect of all nature and nations and the donor of liberty. 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 the abundant and joyful life which you intended for us. You are 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, Redeemer and Friend.

We come, O God, to offer our thanks and praise this day for the freedoms and blessings we enjoy in this great nation. Our hearts are filled with gratitude for the freedom to work, to learn, to speak, to worship. We thank you for men and women who have sacrificed so much to secure liberty for us and for peoples around the world. We thank you for family and friends who give our lives meaning and purpose. We thank you for the glory of your creation which testifies to your power and your love for us. We thank you that you invite us into your presence and call us to live as your children.

Even as our hearts fill with gratitude because of the blessings of life and liberty which we enjoy, our hearts break because of the overwhelming needs in our world. Too many of our brothers and sisters in the human family suffer persecution because of religious or political convictions. Grant us courage to work for their freedom, knowing that none are truly free until all are free. Too many around the world suffer because of hunger, disease, or violence. Give us hearts of compassion and spirits of peace that the needs of others might move us to respond. Too many in our own community feel the pain of loneliness or neglect or despair. O Lord, so fill us with your generosity and hospitality that they cannot but overflow through our lives, that our actions and attitudes may bring healing and reconciliation. Make of us messengers of your hope and love and agents of your peace and compassion, with the knowledge that by your grace, we can bring light and life to a dark and hurting world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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