

The Spirit of Truth and Wisdom
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
May 26, 2013

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

¹Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?
²On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
³beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:
⁴“To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all that live.
²²The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
²³Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
²⁴When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
²⁵Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth—
²⁶when he had not yet made earth and fields,
or the world’s first bits of soil.
²⁷When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
²⁸when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
²⁹when 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;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
³¹rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.

John 16:12-15

¹²“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When 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. ¹⁴He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Sometimes, children are taught about the trinity using the example of ice, water, and steam, explaining that they are all the same substance, but different in the ways they appear. This is one of the most creative explanations I know of but this analogy leaves no room for one very critical characteristic

of the trinity. Water cannot be in liquid, solid, and gas forms at the same time, in any combination, but the trinity is present as one substance and three persons in all acts. The trinity is not like Clark Kent and Superman or Bruce Wayne and Batman, never seen together in the same place. The gospel of John opens with the reminder that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.” And our reading from Proverbs today, which poetically names the Spirit as Wisdom, is spoken in the voice of the Spirit, saying, “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.” The examples of these two readings emphasize the unity of the three persons of the trinity.

In fact, the very word “trinity” captures the unity of the Godhead. Trinity isn’t a word you’ll find in the Bible. The closest you’ll get to a description of the trinity might well be the reading from John. Dean Philip Turner writes of the gospel reading that “It plainly addresses the relation between the Father who is said to have all that belongs to the Son, and the Son who is said to have all that belongs to the Father, and the Spirit (of truth) who takes what belongs to the Son and declares it to the disciples.”¹ When trying to explain this relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the early church fathers were very attentive to the fact that others thought them to be polytheistic, worshipping many gods. In naming our one God in three persons, they created a word from “tri-” for three and “unity” – trinity. Turner suggests this abstract theological term enters our very real, very concrete lives in this way: “...when Christians pray, typically they address the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.”²

We’ve gotten a lot of the Spirit in our lectionary readings lately and, frankly, that’s a good thing. The Spirit often remains nebulous, the person of God not really defined, not really mentioned. We can probably recall the flames and violent wind of Pentecost when we try to think of a Bible story about the Spirit and maybe we can even recall the dove at Jesus’ baptism but our biblical references around the Spirit are far fewer than those of Jesus or even of God in direct contact with people. Today in John, we read that the Spirit will both guide and declare. Guiding suits our gentle image of the Spirit but declaring seems rather forceful, doesn’t it? And then we read in Proverbs that Wisdom raises her voice! Takes a stand! Rejoices! Delights! The Spirit is particularly expressive in our readings, with a personality all her own, as Proverbs tells it. Wisdom, you see, is feminine both in Hebrew and in Greek,

¹ *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 3*, p. 44.

² *Ibid.*

where *sophia* is the word for wisdom. This feminine attribute can round out our understanding of “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.”³

This wisdom, this Spirit, of Proverbs can seem surprising in another way. Pastor Jeff Paschal writes, “When we say the word ‘wisdom,’ don’t we often imagine a stern, tight-lipped person, a killjoy, or a solemn judge in black robe? But that is not the picture of wisdom here. Wisdom is not dour drudgery; Wisdom is joyous laughter, dance, and play. And to top it off, Wisdom rejoices in *us*, in humanity.”⁴ The passages preached upon, and the leaning of the preacher preaching, often have a heavy emphasis on how we fall short, intended more so to emphasize how far we have yet to go. There need not be apology for this because the reminders given are needed to keep us mindful. Jesus’ message was not one of complacency or satisfaction with the way the world is. If we’re not encouraged to strive for the greater things, the rest can seem good enough. But not today; today our readings, and this message, are about God’s nurture of us and delight in us.

The Spirit of truth comes for us to guide us into all the truth. Eugene Bay, President of Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, explains, “[We] will be inclined to understand ‘truth’ as the equivalent of ‘facts,’ or perhaps as a reference to wisdom. But in John’s Gospel, ‘truth’ is a reference to Jesus, who is ‘the truth.’ So the ‘truth’ into which the community is to be guided has to do with Jesus himself, providing both greater clarity about all that he has said and deeper conviction regarding who he is.”⁵ Thus, God the Spirit comes to guide us into God the Son. And the Spirit of Wisdom rejoices and delights to show us the way to do the same, to see creation as God does, rejoicing in God’s inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

This example of rejoicing and delighting actually comes back to “the truth,” particularly “the truth” as Jesus. Jesus revealed the way and the truth and the life in how he lived and the Spirit came to be sure we understood that. Through the Spirit it becomes clear that Jesus’ life was an example of loving one another, of seeing one another as God the Son and God the Father and God the Spirit see us, with joy and delight. Through the Spirit it becomes clear that Jesus looks beyond our limitations to our potential, Jesus finds the good and elevates it further. Through the Spirit it becomes clear that Jesus’ life was, and is, about nurturing and restoring relationships between himself and humankind and between people and communities and between one person and another. The essence of these messages is elegantly simple (and trinitarian): love God, love one another, pass it on. Rejoice in God. Delight in God. Rejoice in one another. Delight in one another. And then take it to the heights, beside the way, and at the crossroads – take a stand. So may it be for you and for me.

³ Genesis 1:26

⁴ *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 3*, p. 29.

⁵ *Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 3*, p. 44.

Let us pray: Father, Son, and Spirit, we give thanks that you call us yours, teaching us, watching out for us, guiding us, rejoicing in us. Give us eyes and hearts to do the same for one another, we pray. Amen.