

Lady Wisdom Calls
Proverbs 8:1-31
June 16, 2019

When I google “the Trinity in Christianity” this is what I get: *The idea that God is three in one is confusing to many people. God exists as three persons, yet he is one being. Each person of the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—has a separate identity while yet possessing the full nature of God.*

So what do you think when you try to articulate the idea of God as three persons? I suspect that we are confused. So on this Trinity Sunday I felt it would be helpful to reflect together on this fundamental belief within our church.

Every month at the communion service we stand together and say that we believe in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God, we confess is three persons but one substance. It’s difficult to get our minds around this idea. In the bible there is no official definition of Trinity anywhere. But there are places where Trinity is affirmed without using the technical words to define it.

Two stories from the Gospels come to mind. **One** is the baptism of Jesus. As he emerges from the water he sees the heavens torn open and the Spirit descends like a dove. And he hears a voice that affirms: *You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.* **Two** is the transfiguration. On this occasion Jesus appearance is transformed and he seems almost translucent. This other dimension breaking in on them terrifies the disciples, Peter, James and John. Again a voice is heard out of the cloud that descends on them: *This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him.*

In each story the Father’s voice is heard, and Jesus as Son is the one celebrated by God. In the baptism all three persons of the Trinity are evident: Father (voice), Son (baptized), Spirit (descends). But of course the Trinity of persons is noted in many different New Testament texts and stories. So while it is not technically spelled out as in our confessions, God as three persons is active throughout the New Testament. And as we have seen today from our Old Testament

reading, God as Son and Spirit, co-equal with the Father is active in the unfolding message of the Hebrew Scriptures.

In the history of the church the understanding of the Trinity was a source of great controversy. In 1054 it became one of the reasons for the separation of the Greek Orthodox Church and the Western Roman Catholic. The Greek rejected the filioque clause that said that the Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son.

In our reading today from Proverbs God the Son is personified as Wisdom. In the poem wisdom is personified as a woman. She stands at the crossroads, at the city gates, in all the important places people gather. She cries out to us:

To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live.

Woman Wisdom stands on the heights, along the highways, at the crossroads, at the city gates and she shouts at the top of her voice. Her message is public theology par excellence -- this female figure crosses over into the public sphere and in the process breaks the stereotypes of female demure and passivity. And her powerful words in the rest of the lectionary reading match the loudness of her delivery when she outlines the central role she performs in creation. She is the master worker of creation and sets the boundaries of the ocean. Listen again to her plea:

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.

The poet wants us to know that Wisdom is woven into the warp and woof of all that is. She is also intimate with God, God's delight every day, playing before God in the world and delighting in the human family.

What an amazing portrait of God as Son. Wisdom was at the heart of creation. And the Son is intimate with God and the like the Spirit is playful. And they delight in us.

As an aside, this picture of God is so far removed from what we hear sometimes. One of the most famous sermons preached at the beginning of the 2nd Great Awakening in the 18th century was given by one of America's most famous preachers. Jonathan Edwards' "*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*", was a sermon preached in the early 1700's. His image in the sermon almost seems sadistic: God is depicted as dangling sinners over the fires of hell like someone might dangle a spider over an open flame. Fortunately, the biblical view, and certainly one here in Proverbs, is very different. Here God is portrayed as love, a God of relationship, and of community.

However, true Wisdom is in short supply these days. So perhaps we ought to pay attention to what true wisdom is saying to us. Lady Wisdom reminds us just how far removed we have become from wisdom today. All we have to do is read and listen to the advertisements that call us down a very different path. They claim that to be truly happy we ought to look young, smell good, make lots of money and own as much as we can. From many politicians, from corporate headquarters, from movie studios, from many corners of our society, we hear a very different kind of wisdom from what Lady wisdom teaches us in Proverbs.

If we contrast Proverbs chapter 7 with 8 we get two very different visions of wisdom. Two very different women are presented who seek to win our attention. In chapter seven the author paints a picture of a women who seeks to seduce us with her beauty and allure. She is decked out as a prostitute, "loud and wayward", with "smooth talk" she compels the men to follow her. But it's a trap, like a bird rushing into a snare, "not knowing that it will cost him his life." Her house is actually on the road to hell, Lady Wisdom warns us.

Proverbs 7 and Proverbs 8, in other words, stand in stark contrast to one another as they describe two different ways to go through life. After writing twenty-seven verses in Proverbs 7 to paint a dark

and terrifying picture of the false attractions and costly consequences of sin (personified by the female adulteress), the author then contrasts such a life with thirty-six verses in Proverbs 8 that are as bright and fulfilling as the former ones are dull and tragic. Rather than a life of sin, the writer proclaims the virtuous and healthy attributes of a life of righteousness (personified by Wisdom).

Wisdom is at the very heart of creation. We remember Paul's words about Christ the Son: *Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

In the book of Colossians we read these words describing Jesus Christ: *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created...—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together...For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:15ff)*

However impossible it is for us to understand the Trinity, the biblical witness does speak of three persons who as Father, Son and Spirit are at the source of all that is. Lady wisdom in our poem is suggestive of the Son who is the creator of the entire universe. The Father, Son and Spirit cannot be divorced from one another and yet reflect distinct persons as they relate to creation and us.

John's Gospel opens with these elegant words:

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. (John 1:1-4)

Amen

