

“THE HOLY TRINITY”

Trinity Sunday Proverbs 8:27-31 16 June 2019

Emmanuel Church Staunton VA John D Lane

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.

If there was ever a time for a three-point sermon, Trinity Sunday is it. I'd like to thank Shelby for giving me the opportunity to educate and inspire us all on the Doctrine of the Trinity. I'll find a way to get even later.

Though the three persons of the Trinity each have a biblical foundation, the Trinity itself didn't get described or named until the 2nd century. There was a good bit of—shall we say?—experimentation with language until the church settled on anything like today's mysterious vocabulary. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy has this wonderful paragraph:

“[One] influence may have been the Neopythagorean Middle Platonist Numenius (fl. 150), who posited a triad of gods, calling them, alternately, “Father, creator and creature; fore-father, offspring and descendant; and Father, maker and made” (Guthrie 1917, 125), or on one ancient report, Grandfather, Father, and Son (Dillon 1996, 367).”

Got that?

The passage from Proverbs is similar to the one from Job, when God asks Job, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” (38:4), but with a different emphasis, born of gratitude and faith:

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.

One way by which many people—even atheists—meet God is through creation. A few years back, Bizzy and I and another couple hired a taxi driver to give us a half-day tour of Sao Miguel island in the Azores—generally a much less expensive way to get a pretty good tour. We were going through a pass in the midst of a great deal of beauty, and suddenly the driver stopped, and jumped out of the van. He had seen a rainbow in the distance, way below where we were. In his limited English and our considerably more limited Portuguese, he told us he had never seen anything like this—as we Southerners put it—in his entire put-together. The Creator was very much alive, and still showing us wondrous things. The driver was very excited. The Trinity: Person # 1.

You may remember when the Roman Catholic Church was very focused on what we call the cult of Mary. An Italian woman was down on her knees praying in front of a statue of Mary, when Jesus himself came up beside her. “Carmella,” he called. Carmella paid no attention, and kept on praying. “Carmella,” he called again. Still no response.

“Carmella,” he called. “It’s the Lord.” This time, Carmella stopped long enough to say, “Keepa quiet. I’mma talkin’ to your mama.”

Some years back, many churches rediscovered or remembered that Jesus himself is of some significance to the Christian faith. “WWJD?” we began to ask. What would Jesus do? This tends to minimize obscure texts from Leviticus or Numbers. It even minimizes Paul some of the time.

Every week we concentrate on reading, hearing, and understanding the gospel, the life and teachings of Jesus. What do we learn? How does it affect us? What would Jesus do? It’s amazing how contemporary he can be. It can be annoying to discover Jesus doesn’t always agree with us, and have this be crystal clear. Decision time. Trinity: Person # 2.

During the 1970’s, perhaps earlier, we had the charismatic or spirit renewal. Much of this was centered on glossolalia, speaking in tongues. Speaking in tongues was considered a badge of authenticity by those who cared about such things. I myself always thought that a variety of gifts was what Paul promoted, but maybe I got that out of some spurious source like the Bible—1 Corinthians 14.

The Holy Spirit is not limited to speaking in tongues. It speaks to us in our dreams and visions. It moves our emotions. It enters our heart. It helps us to understand things we have struggled to comprehend. The Spirit is like fire. The Spirit is like wind. It blows where it wills. It cannot be seen, but what it means and what it does can be. Pray for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Trinity: Person # 3.

The Trinity is difficult to comprehend all at once, which is probably why the various persons get special emphasis from time to time or by separate movements at the same time. We have those who are very serious about Creation, the environment, etc. We currently have the Jesus Movement, with an emphasis on following very closely the teachings and actions of Jesus. We have those who believe the Holy Spirit is the way to faith for many of us. All are correct, but the full enchilada is all three persons of the Trinity existing and operating together at the same time. It can be mind-boggling.

In honor of the Trinity, Shelby has decreed there will be Three persons speaking this morning: (1) the preacher; (2) Nick Moga’s on Episcopal Relief & Development; and (3) the third person who is going to deliver the one short timely and actually relevant announcement at the end of the service. Any more, of course, would be heresy, especially on Trinity Sunday.

To review and re-emphasize my primary message: [One] influence may have been the Neopythagorean Middle Platonist Numenius (fl. 150), who posited a triad of gods, calling them, alternately, “Father, creator and creature; fore-father, offspring and descendant; and Father, maker and made” (Guthrie 1917, 125), or on one ancient report, Grandfather, Father, and Son (Dillon 1996, 367).

QED (Quod Erat Demonstrandum)

AMEN.