

The Holy Trinity
First Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, June 19, 2011

Genesis 1:1—2:4a
Psalm 8
2 Corinthians 13:11–13
Matthew 28:16–20
Year A

In the name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

For a string of years our family camped at Bar Harbor, Maine, among the first places in the United States to see the sun rise. Our church friend Steve was the trip planner, and developed, believe it or not, color-coded spread sheets describing what we could see and do, complete with high and low tides for each day.



A highlight was the hikes we would go on. Most memorable in Acadia National Park, the Beehive Trail, not for those afraid of heights, this climbs a 520 foot granite dome overlooking Sand Beach and features an almost exclusively perpendicular ascent on iron rungs inserted into the rock. This trail is so popular that the narrow route crawling with people is said to resemble bees around the hive.

There is just no way that you can imagine navigating a hunk of rock like that, without the hand holds.

That's what the Trinity is for me, a hand hold by which to navigate the mystery of the ineffable divinity.

For everyday ordinary people in the fourth century, they were instrumental in hammering the iron bars of the Trinity. Doctrinal conversation happened in the barbershop. Arguments about the divinity of Christ were common in the taverns.

No slouch himself, one of the great minds of the church, Gregory of Nyssa, commented on the hubbub in what was then called Constantinople. In that day, if you can imagine, it, people were chatting about the nature of Christ everywhere. Gregory said:

If you ask someone how [much something] costs, he replies by dogmatizing on the born and unborn. If you ask the price of bread, they answer you, "The Father is greater than the Son and the Son is subordinate to him." If you ask "Is my bath ready?" they answer you, "The Son has been made out of nothing."

Now imagine going to get some Chabaso bread later this morning and the sales clerk asks you what you did this morning. Would you say that you were pondering the meaning of the Trinity? Might you say you heard poetry about the divine intentions for the world? Or might you even say I was claiming my baptism into God's life. In all three cases, you could be correct.

When the story of creation is being told, our First Reading, it has a certain beauty in its description of order. It has a rhythm to it, punctuated with "and it was Evening, and it was Morning, the first day." It describes a God as involved with the development of flora and fauna, and giving unique stewardship of the earth to the human.

Just to listen to it you might just enjoy the construct of the language. But behind the poetry, around the language, something very doctrinal is being revealed. In contrast to other religions, which have their own epics of the world emerging from warring deities or from the offspring of a goddess, this story frames the Hebrew God, the one God who is known for creativity, and who instills that creative sense in those who are made in the image of the divine.

And in our Feast Day today we revel in participating in the divine life. We affirm that we have been immersed in this Trinitarian way because they are hand holds for us, they are poetic and doctrinal descriptions of our experience. God, our table, our food our server (Catherine of Sienna). God, singer, song, breath (ELW 861), God offering grace, love, and communion (2 Corinthians 13:13). God, three-in-one, one-in-three becomes a language of expansion, becomes a witness to who we are in God, becomes what doctrine does best, which is keeping the good news good.

I'm reading how to reclaim baptism in a post-Christian culture in a book by Samuel Torvend. Torvend lays low an assumption that our theological ideas alone constitute the life of faith. You know, the trinity, justification by faith, or an inclusive church. But interestingly, wonderfully, Torvend and so many others are teaching me to flip that way of thinking 180 degrees. Here's what he says, see if it helps you

*Christians confess their faith in the Triune God—Father, Son, and Spirit—not as a neat though abstract description of God but as an affirmation of the Holy Three who encircle each Christian with creative, saving, and enlightening powers. The seeking soul asks, "What does it mean to be baptized?" It may well mean this: that **the baptized and communed Christian allows this creative, saving, and enlightening presence to shape his or her words and deeds in daily life.***

—from *Flowing Water, Uncommon Birth: Christian Baptism in a Post-Christian Culture* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, © 2011), pp 72-73.

Our words, our doctrine, our Trinitarian commitment flow out of our trip from font to table. They are the mother's milk we feed our children. They are the guidebooks that help us navigate the divine mysteries. They are the iron bars we grip to get to the top of the Beehive Trail to see just how vast God's mercy and God's reach are.

There in the story of creation, was the creator, dancing with the word, intimate with wisdom. Here, in our liturgy, we enact the dance of God in our movement in and out of this space, gathering with each other then dispersed into the world. Here in our worship, we sashay up the aisle to take in the divine life into which we were immersed at baptism, creator, redeemer, spirit, as tangible as bread and wine, as awesome as the minutest particles quarks, which cannot exist in isolation, but only in dances of three, or more.

How wonderful that the language about the Trinity has expanded, and gives hope that we might enjoy speaking about it with one another as much as they did in the 4th century. In that time it was proposed that the Trinity was so mutual in one another, co-equal, co-eternal, indwelling that it could only be described as perichoresis, a dancing around of Father, Son, and Spirit.

So what if you went out to Father's Day brunch today, and your server asked what you did that was special today? Might you say that you joined in a dance of the Trinity?

In the name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.