

Trinity Sunday, 2014

Today's readings are simply lovely. They are like meditations, easily entered-into and understood. No smiting or judging. Only a couple of theologically complicated concepts. I was tempted to use our sermon time to just read through them again. They remind us simply that God is gracious. That God blesses us, helps us, and trusts us to understand that it is our faith, and not our activities, that love God the most. I encourage you to take your bulletin home and give them another slow read-through this evening, maybe while lying in bed, just before turning out your light for sleep.

There is a small bit in the gospel – the theologically complicated part – that provides opportunity for further reflection, and that's the part about being born again. Being born - of the Spirit. The Spirit. Not A Spirit or even God's Spirit. But, The Spirit.

Our friendly systematic theologians would enter here into a conversation about what is called the “unique personhood” of the Holy Spirit. They call it Pneumatology, which studies the specific work, deity, and personality of the Holy Spirit.

I find the idea that the Holy Spirit has its own work interesting. It's everywhere, once you start looking for it, starting at the very beginning, during creation, and well into the lives of ancient Israel. The Holy Spirit is credited with speaking through the prophets. With strengthening them, raising up leaders, and granting courage during battles. In the story of Jesus the Holy Spirit is there in quite tangible ways, from the conception itself, at the baptism, leading Jesus into the wilderness through the temptations, and for empowering him in both his ministry and his death. Later in John's gospel we are told that the Spirit even has its own authority. The Spirit is compared to clothing, like something you wear, and to water. To fire. And to the wind in today's story.

I realized that I lumped all of the stuff the Holy Spirit did in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, as stuff God did. And much of what the Holy Spirit did in the New Testament - also as the work of God the Father helping, and of Jesus. When I think of how the Holy Spirit moves among us today, I tend to lump it into feelings. Awareness. Sensations. The mysterious, immeasurable grace, forgiveness, generosity, and love – visible and invisible – surrounding all of us.

But that's not what our church doctrine says. The church teaches that the Holy Spirit is an entity. The giver of life. The third person of the Trinity. Not just the moving-parts of God and Jesus. And not just a feeling. But it is an entity – as definable as God and Jesus.

A really important thing the Holy Spirit is also credited with is guiding those who recorded some of our oldest stories. The writers of the Bible. It probably wasn't as some imagine – a giant hand coming out of the air and pushing the writer's quill across the page. But the Holy Spirit, instead, seems to have honored the individual lives of those recording their interactions with the holy – their social, ethical, and personal experiences appear on the pages. The Holy Spirit worked within their broken and saintly lives, which is why our stories have so much texture. The Spirit is said to have moved-them-along, like the wind in their sails. But they were the boat, theirs was the mast.

I mentioned our systematic theologians, but our practical theologians say, in a nutshell – you must be able to apply what you learn. What does the doctrine of the trinity have to do with you? With this faith community? With the needs of the world? Where can you see the doctrine of the trinity?

The answer is -

Imagine a mirror before you. What do you see?

For *that* is the fullness of God.

You were created in God's image.

Jesus was fully human, just like you.

Look.

You have also been born of the spirit. Many of you have, at different points along your lives, invited the spirit into your longing, into your joy, into your work. The kingdom of god dwells within you.

Within you, who are musicians, accountants, builders, orphans, engineers, parents. Within you who are grumpy, who snore, who get bored. All of us, this mass and mess of humanity, all lined- up here today, wanting to be of consequence to God's life in our hearts, in this faith family, and in the world.

It doesn't get any more practical than that.

In the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus today, we are told to raise our sails. Not just once. Not in order to be born again. But to be born again, and again, and again. When the diagnosis comes, or the promotion doesn't. When our companions leave, and when spring breaks forth once more.

So tonight – read these words. Look in the mirror. Be blessed, have mercy. Sleep in God's promises. For God so loved the world, and all of us who walk and dance and drag ourselves across it, that he gave us not just one chance to get it right, but the chance to ask, twice a day if we need to, to be born in the Spirit. To be borne on the wind.

God, we thank you for sending the Holy Spirit to move our hearts, to give us life, to fill our sails and bring us to faith. Amen.