

“Wisdom Calls”

June 12, 2022

Living the Spirit Life series – Trinity Sunday

Last week, it was holy chaos on Pentecost - when the Holy Spirit came in power. Pastor Jim Cymbala quotes an early Methodist preacher when he says, “Christianity is hopeless without the Holy Spirit.” We need the Spirit and are filled with the Spirit’s power.

Cymbala says that the Holy Spirit is underappreciated. In our United Methodist tradition, we don’t use a lot of Holy Spirit language. Perhaps we talk about God and Jesus, but for some, speaking about the Holy Spirit isn’t as comfortable. We sing about the Spirit, and that serves us well, but we don’t speak about it much. I’ve heard people say, “I’m not sure what to say about the Holy Spirit. It seems so unpredictable.” And if Pentecost teaches us anything, it’s that the Spirit is unpredictable.

A colleague shared this image of the Spirit that I found helpful: “The Holy Spirit is like that supervisor who invites us to do a big, difficult job, and then equips us, and supports us, and empowers us to accomplish that job. The Holy Spirit sends us into the world to do God’s work as well, but we are not sent out on our own without the resources to accomplish our task.” We have the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit isn’t simply the presence of God with us, but also the power of God in us.

Today it’s Trinity Sunday, when we focus more intentionally on understanding the Trinity - one God, three persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Maybe you’ve wondered how that works. The Trinity is perhaps the most complicated part of our Christian faith, and yet it’s so important to grasp. And I wonder if we’ve spent too much energy trying to pin down the Trinity and exact it rather than seeking to experience it.

I invite you to see an image today - an icon - created by Andrei Rublev in the 15th century. **SLIDE:** Rublev icon. It’s depiction of three visitors to Abraham from the account in Genesis 18. Many scholars have taken this as a representation of the Trinity - with the icon inviting us to the table because the one seat is empty. We’re invited into relationship with the Triune God. In Rublev’s time, one writer says, “the Trinity was the embodiment of spiritual unity, peace, harmony, mutual love and humility.” It’s a lovely sentiment; I wonder where we’ve lost that.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work together in relationship to each other, and that’s the key – relationship. It’s the key to how we connect to God in Christ, and it’s the same for the Trinity. If you want a \$10,000 word to describe this relationship, it’s a Greek word **SLIDE:** definition of *perichoresis*. Breaking it down, *peri* means around,

and *choresis* means to make room or give way. It describes the dance of the Divine - how Father, Son and Holy Spirit share this mutual indwelling and relationship.

So, it's about relationship. For example, I'm one person, but I'm a daughter, a spouse, a mother, a pastor. It's still me, but the relationship I have with specific people is different. I notice that in different ways at different times. Yesterday at Ana's open house was one of those moments. Family, friends, and church family gathered, and it was a convergence of my life and our family's life. I'm connected to all of those people, but in different ways. Relationship is the key.

We heard two readings this morning. First, a small part of Jesus' final words to his followers. It's as if he's passing on instructions - maybe like a parent giving instructions to someone who will watch their children and making sure they have all of the right information in case something should happen. Ivan and I had a document when our kids were little: *Here's my cell phone. Here's my where we'll be. Here are others who can help.*

Jesus is giving the disciples what they need to know about how to live in the world as he prepares for all that's ahead. He's on his way to the cross. And there's a lot that he says in a few chapters, even as he moves from giving instructions to making a promise of the Holy Spirit coming.

Just as we might struggle to understand the Holy Spirit, I wonder if they did too. It wasn't that the Spirit would give them future insight or make it so they knew everything that was coming. The Spirit was a presence and power to help them stay connected to Jesus after he was gone from their sight. Remember we're backtracking to before Jesus is crucified. The promise here is that Jesus will be connected to them. Jesus will be reachable even though he won't be in their physical presence, and I can only imagine their heads spinning trying to understand.

And it's not just that Jesus is near; it's that the Spirit will guide them to truth. The Spirit will help them to seek the Kingdom of God in its fullness. The Spirit will guide them in ways that lead to life, hope, love, and deeper faith. The Spirit will comfort, convict, challenge, and correct.

Perhaps that's the best connection for what we read in the passage from Proverbs 8. Bishop David Bard used some of this passage in a sermon he preached about wisdom at the worship service where we celebrate ordination and commissioning - sending people out to serve in pastoral ministry. And his encouragement was very clear: we need wisdom.

Wisdom calls out from the world and invites us to pay attention. In Proverbs, Wisdom is feminine and makes clear that she has been God's helper from the beginning. Bishop Bard shared his take - that wisdom must be coupled with humility, prudence, and an appreciation for complexity. It's not so simple all the time. We need an appreciation for the *both/and* nature of faith and living with questions.

Bishop Bard also said, “Isn’t it interesting that in the middle of our Bible we find (Psalms) a book of songs and poems that sing for joy and cry out in lament; and a book of wisdom (Proverbs) that ponders the world and tries to make some sense of it all. A faith rooted in the God of this Bible is a faith inviting us to hold all that we know and experience in our souls. It invites us to let God’s Spirit work in us so that we have large souls, capacious (or roomy) hearts, and expansive minds.” He reminded me of the need for openness of heart, spirit, and mind as we continue to seek God’s will and way.

We need wisdom, which is different than knowledge. We might know how to do a lot, but wisdom is a bit different. Some say that wisdom is knowledge applied. I get that, but wisdom seems more holy than that. Frederick Buechner writes: “Wisdom is a matter not only of the mind but of the intuition and the heart.” Wisdom is something we seek - so with it goes a good dose of humility - an understanding that we’re not quite there.

Wisdom calls out for us to seek. It’s not that we see ourselves as lacking wisdom, but that we understand the ongoing growth of life with God. There’s something here about the Spirit’s work to keep on opening us to God’s working in our lives and in the world.

Whenever I spend time with my childhood friends, they usually ask about what my next sermon is about. I told them it was about wisdom today. So, one friend mentioned the collection of quotes, lyrics, verses, and songs that Ana requested for her graduation celebration. It really is a great offering of collective wisdom that help us understand and grow. People took time to think about what’s meaningful to them, and it’s really a source of wisdom, guidance, and help.

As we claim our faith and go boldly into the world, remember that relationship is the key even as we seek God. Some of you may be familiar with the book **SLIDE:** *The Shack* picture. For me, it’s one of the most interesting takes on the Trinity – and understanding that relationship of one God, three persons. Here you see the depiction from the film version with Mack. The Spirit is depicted as a woman, and much of her activity is almost like a dance in relationship with the others.

The Holy Spirit is God’s present activity in our midst. I appreciate the God moment that was shared about the experience of the Holy Spirit at a memorial service - and the surprise that it was. In our United Methodist teaching, we say that the Holy Spirit is working when we sense God’s leading, God’s challenge, God’s support, and God’s comfort. Maybe that’s helpful to remember because then maybe we can claim it a little more boldly. We share “God moments” that proclaim God’s leading, challenge, support, and comfort. That’s the Holy Spirit!

And that paying attention is important. Proverbs says that Wisdom calls out to us. We need to nurture a thinking faith in Jesus, a faith that is critical in the sense

that we look around and include what we know in how we live our faith. In our Wesleyan/Methodist tradition, we look at Scripture as our primary source of God's revelation, but we also consider tradition, reason, and experience. All of them help us to understand who God is and who God calls us to be.

Bishop Bard also shared this: "Biblical wisdom, deep Spirit wisdom in Jesus Christ knows that God continues to be at work in the world in amazing and surprising ways. Biblical wisdom, deep Spirit wisdom in Jesus Christ listens to the often unheard or underheard voices that speak of alternatives, that speak of deep pain and radical hope. Biblical wisdom, deep Spirit wisdom in Jesus Christ remains open to being surprised by how it is the longed-for tidal wave of justice can rise up and hope and history rhyme."

Wisdom calls from many places in our lives. Will we listen? Are we paying attention? Jesus promises the gift of the Spirit to help us. What a gift to know that God is relational just as God calls us into relationship. What a gift to praise God who seeks us, who connects with us, who guides and calls and shapes us - and even surprises us. What a gift to know that God is with through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Thanks be to God! Amen.