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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, June 12, 2022
The Holy Trinity/1st Sunday after Pentecost/Year C
First Reading: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31
Second Reading: Romans 5:1-5
Gospel Reading: John 16:12-15
Sermon Title: “*Guided Into All Truth*”

Theme

“O LORD our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!” Today we celebrate the holy Trinity. Paul writes that through Jesus we have peace with God, whose love pours into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, giving us lasting hope. We celebrate the gracious One-in-Three, eternal Three-in-One, as we worship in community; as we share water and word, bread and wine; and as we bring God’s love and hope to our neighbors.

Texts:

First Reading: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

¹Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?

²On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;

³beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:

⁴“To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all that live.

²²The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.

²³Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

²⁴When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.

²⁵Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth—

²⁶when he had not yet made earth and fields,
or the world's first bits of soil.
²⁷When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
²⁸when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
²⁹when 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,
³⁰then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
³¹rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.”

Second Reading: Romans 5:1-5

¹Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Gospel: John 16:12-15

[Jesus said,] ¹²“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

Sermon

The First Reading from Proverbs anthropomorphizes wisdom, (i.e., makes wisdom sound like a being, a person, rather than a thing). That might seem strange to us because I think that we most often think of wisdom as a thing; the accumulation of knowledge accompanied by understanding and experience leading to perception and insight. However, in this passage, wisdom speaks to us, and tells us its history, and so on. So wisdom is presented as a being.

And being that we are just a Sunday away from The Day of Pentecost, the day we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus spoke of the coming of the Spirit of truth to his disciples in the Gospel Reading, and the apostle Paul spoke of the Holy Spirit in his letter to the Romans, we can make the logical jump and presume the writer of this portion of Proverbs was inspired by God to write in the first person about a being he couldn't have known much about, since the Holy Spirit was rarely present before the Resurrection, and he was inspired to write about it in human terms, something his readers can relate to, in the same way Jesus is the incarnation of God.

Before we go any further, we have to be careful to remember that Proverbs was written by human beings and were often trying to capture the essence of an idea, and not necessarily the substance. For example, in verse 22, wisdom said,

²²The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.

²³Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

If indeed the first-person voice speaking here is what we know as the Holy Spirit, a name that had not yet developed. It seems to indicate that the LORD created it at the beginning of the earth. Let us remember that the earth was all that was known back then, and the doctrine of the Trinity had also not yet been developed. Let us not get lost in the weeds here. The point of the proverb is to let us know how intimately connected the Holy Spirit is with the LORD God. This matters as we move to the Gospel Reading from John.

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We are still in Jesus' Farewell Discourse from the Gospel of John. John's Jesus only used the proper name, "the Holy Spirit" twice in his entire Gospel. Jesus used other names, like the "Spirit of truth," more often. As I said, the concept of the Holy Spirit was still developing in the first century.

Jesus has been sounding like a broken record these last couple of weeks, promising this other being that will take his place. In this week's Gospel Reading, like last week's, Jesus called it the "Spirit of truth." The purpose of the "Spirit of truth" is to continue the education of the disciples as they transition to apostles and are sent out to spread the Good News of the Gospel.

Those of you who are college graduates, do you remember graduating and being all puffed up with your new degree, and then showing up for the first day of your professional career? I do. I was hired as an Industrial Engineer trainee for Parker Hannifin. However, the guy who was supposed to train me, quit before I got there. My reputation precedes me, I guess. And with no other industrial engineer on staff, I got a baptism by fire! I remember enjoying going out in the plant and watching the machinists turn chunks of steel and iron into finished parts. Honestly, machine work still fascinates me. I had some book knowledge but I had no practical knowledge. I found myself being a student once again. And let me say here, that the best employees are lifetime learners, am I right?

The disciples had been with Jesus for three years or so and had even been successful on a couple of mission trips without him. But faced with knowing he was no longer going to be with them, was surely frightening and so, in that way that Jesus always had about knowing what is going on in the minds of people, he told them,

'There is so much you need to know, but you can't absorb it all right now. However, the Spirit of truth will soon come to you and guide you into the future. The Spirit obediently speaks whatever the Father wants it to, so you can believe that its inspiration comes from God.'

And then at the conclusion of the Gospel Reading, Jesus told his disciples that what the Holy Spirit tells them comes from his Heavenly Father, and will bring him, Jesus, glory, which in turn glorifies his Heavenly Father.

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Does the coming of the Holy Spirit and its dwelling in us mean that somehow we all of a sudden have superpowers? Not at all, in fact, the opposite may be true. Paul, the tireless apostle to the Gentiles and author of the Second Reading from his letter to the Romans, suffered mightily for the sake of the Gospel. And he also wrote that it's not all that bad. What he wrote specifically was,

³we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,
⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not disappoint us

So I have arranged a suffering event after church. Let's see a show of hands who want to attend! None of us want to suffer. And here let me say that suffering is not always physical. It can be emotional or psychological as well, and that suffering may be worse.

Many years ago in the little church up north, I ministered to a young woman who was diagnosed with stage four breast cancer. She had teenage children at the time and had every reason to want to live. When she first brought me into her struggle she was hysterical and distressed. I did the best I could with her, walking with her through her suffering. She increased her efforts in Bible reading, prayer, and meditation. I think that at the beginning, she probably thought God would reward her for her newfound devotion with a miracle healing. That did not happen. She continued to decline, and near the end, in one of the last visits I had with her, she told me that through her Bible reading, prayer, and meditation she had found that peace that surpasses all understanding. Through her spiritual disciplines, she discovered something of greater value and her physical wellness. She found peace with God and trusted God with not only her own well-being but also the well-being of her husband and two young children.

That thought comes from Paul's letter to the Philippians and I think it is important for you to know his complete thought:

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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Rejoice always? Even with a cancer diagnosis? Even when suffering?

Yes, even when suffering. I confess that I have not experienced that kind of suffering; so sick from the treatment and surgeries that the patient looks forward to death as the end of suffering – and if this is too close to the bone for some of you, I'm sorry, hang in there with me.

Back to Paul's letter to the Romans,

³we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,
⁴and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵and hope does not disappoint us

He said suffering produces endurance. I have seen this many times. A suffering person wonders how they will get through another minute of their suffering, and yet they really have no choice. They do get through it one way or another.

And he wrote that endurance produces character. I have ministered to people who have gone through heart-wrenching ordeals, and on the other side, have said, "I would never ask for such an ordeal, but having come through it, I am a better person." I dare say, what they meant was their overcoming produced greater character. Indeed, I believe God gives us trials for that very reason, to build character into us. After coming through an ordeal, the wise and faithful person knows that God has their back.

And Paul wrote that "character produces hope." Once again, when we overcome a trial, we know that we can overcome the next thing that comes our way. We have hope because we've been tried before and overcame it.

The faithful person trusts that come what may, God always has our best interests at heart. Even if we are overcome by our trial, God has something even better in mind for us. Hope does not disappoint us.

Paul concluded this passage by writing that we can get through our suffering, building our endurance and character and having hope,

because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

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The faithful and well-schooled disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ has this because they, you and I, know the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

- It has prodded us into doing things we may not have ever thought of doing;
- It has pushed us out of our comfort zones;
- It has forced us to learn new things and meet new people;
- And we have become excited about our involvement and accomplishments.

That is the work of the Spirit of truth that Jesus spoke of. The reason the apostle Paul could be so excited for ministry amid incredible persecution is that he was so full of the Holy Spirit that he could do no other – and he did it joyfully!

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

Jesus told his disciples that their new assignment as apostles will be a challenge. There is more that they will need to know. He won't be the one to teach them, but they will not be left to fend for themselves. Jesus said the "Spirit of truth" will come to them and guide them into their futures.

The same is true for us. Though we never did ministry with Jesus in the same way his disciples did, we too have been given the Spirit of truth, what the church calls the Holy Spirit. And because of that gift, we can allow ourselves to be led by the same Holy Spirit, and be confident in the ministry we do, because come what may, God has our backs.

Prayer

Divine Godhead, three in one and one in three, in your genius you are just who we need you to be when we need you. Inspire us to grow in spiritual disciplines so that we trust you to guide us in all truth in every moment of our lives. Amen