

St. James the Fisherman
Trinity Sunday, 11.vi.2017
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When I was an undergraduate, I once went to a church near my college on Trinity Sunday. (It must have been a year when Easter was very early, since college was still in session.) In his sermon, the rector made no reference to the holy and undivided Trinity. I was outraged, and (being a smart-ass churchy kid) I wrote him a letter saying so in no uncertain terms. I was invited (all of this was, of course, by snail mail) to visit the rector in his study, where he patiently informed me that he thought there were more important things to talk about that Sunday (none of them related to the assigned Scripture readings). I was polite during our meeting, but my opinion was unchanged. (I later discovered that the same priest—now long deceased—was a member of the congregation of this chapel.)

Six and a half decades later, I have some sympathy for that man. The concept of a God known in three distinct ways—Father, Son, Spirit who is really one, indivisible—is not easy to explain. Early Christians spilt plenteous ink—and some blood—working out what knowing God as Trinity means: three in one and one in three. If I were to say that the doctrine of Trinity was beyond the intellectual capacity of the priest I so rudely criticized, I would not be putting him in the corner alone. He would have lots of company. And indeed the Gospel for Trinity Sunday in the 1928 Prayer Book emphasizes the difficulty of comprehending deity: “We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?” [John 3] (The difficulty is compounded by the language of the King James version.)

The readings for this year in the current Book of Common Prayer give an easier, albeit oblique, approach to explaining the reality of a God who is one in three, three in one, undivided Trinity.

We begin at the beginning: with the creation myth of the Hebrew book of Genesis. "The earth was a formless void" to which the Creator God added light, dividing day from night. Next comes a dome: the sky over earth; then the emergence of land from the waters; the appearance of vegetation on the land; the creation of sun and moon to give light and seasons; the appearance of living creatures on land, in the air, and in the waters; and finally humankind—and the rest, we might say, is history.

We know that the Genesis creation story is a pre-scientific etiological myth, that it does not fit the known facts of cosmology and natural history. For at least a century many have thought there is a conflict between the Biblical version of human origins and that of Darwinian evolution and paleontology. But the apparent difference has become even more radical in our own time. We now know that in the universe earth is but a speck revolving about another speck. We know that the universe began with an explosion of some primordial material billions of years ago and that the universe continues to expand. Just this week, we learned in the news that the history of the genus *homo sapiens* can be documented back 300,000 years (100,000 years more than had previously been documented), and it is now thought that *homo sapiens* emerged not from an "Adam" in eastern Africa but a number of places on the continent of Africa.

Yet there is a resonance in the Genesis creation story (and, by the way, there is more than one creation myth in Genesis) that continues to speak to us. In the full moon Friday night, in the blue aether of the heavens on a day like yesterday, in the quiet of the woods, in the tumult of the sea and the still of the ponds, in the creatures that share our space, we feel a kind of cosmic coherence and order. We know the science and at least some

of us believe and accept it, but we can still feel and sing with Joseph Addison's eighteenth-century rationalist mysticism that the "spacious firmament" proclaims in "reason's ear" that "the hand that made us is divine." There is order, there is reason, there are ideals, there are moral imperatives—all implicit in what we see around us. There is a Creator behind it all, if not in the same ways as has been thought before (not in reading the beginning of Genesis literally). We "proclaim the great Original," the Creator, as God and parent ("Father"). We owe thanksgiving and respect for the gift of earth, our island home. "O Lord our Governor, how exalted is your Name in all the world!"

But our world is fallen and endangered, and the perilous condition of the part of creation in which we live is largely—nay exclusively—because of the [mis]doings of *homo sapiens*. We are reminded of this overwhelming fact every day in many ways. Theologically, we call it "sin", "fallenness."

We say that it goes all the way back, to the beginnings (however many hundreds of thousands of years that may have been) of humanity: mythically to Adam and Eve somehow desecrating the created order and to their son Cain's murder of his brother. But we have hope that things can be set right, that we can be/are redeemed. And it is in Jesus' teaching, example, sacrifice and resurrection that we have hope of redemption, of escape from the cycle of sinfulness. Because we have this revelation by and faith in Jesus we see him as perfectly representing the intentions and expectations of the creation, of the creator; and so we call him the Son of God.

In this morning's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples that this is his mission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." And he tells them to work for the restoration of the world, the drawing together of humankind to change, to redeem the world, to make the world the

peaceable kingdom it was made to be. The phrase, “teaching them [the rest of humanity] to obey everything that I have commanded you,” sounds presumptuous, authoritarian, imperialistic today. But it means ultimately to set the standard of love for the creation and to bring others to embrace that re-visioning.

So we believe that Jesus the Redeemer is and is from the Creator.

Jesus’ direction to his followers is the same as Paul’s “appeal”: “agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of peace will be with you.” The kiss of peace is the sign that we are united in the fellowship of Jesus and that God is in and with us. This is the Spirit, the sanctifier, the way in which we—as the community dedicated to the restoration of the world—are ourselves in and with God. “The communion of the Holy Spirit” is with and in us *all*.

Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier. Holy and undivided Trinity, one God.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of us. Amen.