

WGUMC June 16, 2019  
Proverbs 8:1-4; 22-36

“The Trinity: Taking Aim at God”

This July marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Apollo moon landing, and I was listening to an NPR interview with Charles Fishman talking about his new book, *One Giant Leap*. Fishman was telling Dave Davies that NASA worried about how to teach its pilots to bring two spaceships together in orbit. Because of orbital dynamics, piloting a spaceship is counter-intuitive. In space, you can't just aim your ship at another ship and fly straight to it. If you do, you'll miss it. You'll end up above and behind it. In fact, the harder you charge at the thing, the farther away from it you get.

So, I'm driving along, listening, and it strikes me that all of our talking about God, our aiming at God, suffers from the same problem. With all the limits of our human knowledge and language, we can't fly directly at God. And if we try, we are bound to miss. The folks who try the hardest to convince us that they are absolutely right about God are usually the farthest off from God.

The Bible seems to know this instinctively, which is why the Bible uses metaphors for God. Metaphors don't fly straight. In the words of Emily Dickinson, they "tell it slant." Metaphors use indirect ways to get closer to the truth of God than our most precise definitions ever will. Which is why we can call God, "Father." It is a metaphor, an indirect way of talking about God that recognizes that our inner-space, our God-space, is slanted just as outer space is curved. Pretty cool, huh?

God isn't biologically our father. But those who call God "Father," do so because they experience God to be like a father in many ways. Metaphors also work the other way, by the way. When we call God "Father," we also expect that our own fathers will see it as a personal challenge to try to be more godly, to listen to God more closely, to obey God more diligently, without acting as if they are God, hopefully. Happy Father's Day!

The only rule for using metaphors for God is that no one metaphor can say it all. "Father" doesn't say everything we want to

say about God. In fact, Father is only a third of the Trinity, which is the Church's attempt to take aim at God.

Christians have a trinity of names for God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (or Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer). Now whether you picture the Trinity as a triangle or trefoil or three-legged stool, it is just another metaphor for the Ultimate Mystery. Yet you won't find the word "Trinity" in the Bible. We only have hints of our Three-in-one God in Scripture. The most direct reference is found at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, when the risen Lord tells the apostles, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." [Matthew 28:19]

But if the Trinity is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then why, on this Trinity Sunday, does the lectionary give us a reading from Proverbs that personifies the wisdom of God as a woman? "Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand...."

Isn't it ironic that we get such a feminine image of the divine on Father's Day? No, it is not a feminist plot. We read about Lady Wisdom today because she is dropping us another hint about the trinitarian nature of God. Today we read that she was with God from the very beginning. Our text says: "The Lord created me at the beginning of his work...Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth...."

Whenever I read those verses, I immediately think of the Word in the Prologue of the Gospel of John. The verses we read every Christmas start out with "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." The early Church saw this connection, too, and from the beginning, they identified the Wisdom of God in Proverbs with the Word of God in John. Christians long ago understood Lady Wisdom and Christ to be the same person. You can't blame me for introducing some femininity into the Trinity!

So we have God the Father and God the Son at the beginning of everything. We're only missing the Spirit. For that, we have to go back to the creation story in Genesis. In the King James Version, we read the words, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the *Spirit of God* moved upon the face of the waters." [Genesis 1:1-2]

Now we are ready to take our indirect aim at God. Who was with God at the beginning? In Proverbs, it is the Wisdom of God, which is in John the Word of God, aka Christ, who we call the Son of God. And in Genesis we have the Spirit of God. So putting them all together, we have the Trinity—Father, Son and Spirit—all three involved in the act of creating at the very beginning. And as far as the Church is concerned, this is the closest we have come to arriving at the true nature of our Creator.

Why is any of this important? Because the Trinity doesn't just tell us something about the nature of God. It tells us something

about our own nature, and about the nature of Nature. In fact, Trinity is a very good metaphor for all of reality. Trinity says that God, the very source of our being, the source of all being, is fundamentally relational. Three persons in one God. In Christianity, that means that we can't talk about divine nature without talking about the relationships between the divine persons.

That's a task for theology. But the task for us is to understand that Trinity is simply our way of saying that God is not only *IN* relationship; God *IS* relationship. Another way to say that is: God is love. And the more we see how interconnected everything is, the more we begin to grasp all the relationships in nature, in society, and in our family, the more we see the love, the more we see the visible evidence of the Trinity.

Everything is connected, according to great artists like Leonardo da Vinci, ecologists like Barry Commoner, preachers like John Wesley, and Scripture like Colossians 1:16-17: "...for in [Christ] all

things in heaven and on earth were created...and in him all things hold together.” [Colossians 1:15-17]

Christ is holding it all together so that the whole creation can be a reflection of its Creator. And why does connection matter?

Because our relational God wants to be in relationship with us. God is love and God can't *BE* love without something *TO* love. We were created to be in relationship *with God* and with what is *of God* in each other. In other words, we were created to be in community.

On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God came down and created a community. This community was a visible image of a relational God, a trinitarian community that we call the Church. At its best, the Church has always been the community through which our triune God carries on the work of creating, redeeming and sustaining relationships. At least in theory.

But in reality, the Church is full of the same broken people in broken relationships that we find everywhere else in the world. The harmony, the unity in diversity, that is modeled by God as Trinity is

something that we keep taking aim at and mostly keep missing. In our society, some of us don't accept and some of us don't know what to do with diversity, and even when we aim for it, we usually miss the goal of unity.

I'm afraid that the consequences of our bad aim will be on full display at Annual Conference this week in Modesto where we will grapple with how to be church in spite of the actions of the Special Conference. These days, we don't know whether we are United or Un-tied Methodists, and that isn't a typo! We could sure use Lady Wisdom taking her stand at this crossroads, raising her voice, crying out to all who live. We need to hear her words, "And now my children, listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways."

The Book of Proverbs is full of practical wisdom worth keeping, and I want to give you some. In this time of deep division about LGBTQIA persons and clergy in our church, divisions that are mirrored in society, Lady Wisdom reminds us that God is beyond our concepts of binary gender. God is Father. God is Son. The Word is

Wisdom. But Wisdom is a woman, and the Spirit is both and neither and, like the wind, blows where it chooses. [John 3:8]

If we were a little less concerned about sex and gender, we could take a lot of pressure off of men and women, fathers and mothers, as we are trying to figure out who we are and what we are about in the midst of ever-changing expectations of what we are supposed to do. Hank and I try to be a team. He does the floors; I do the bathrooms. He does the finances; I do the yard work. He fixes the computers; I find things for him in the refrigerator. We share the shopping and the cooking. It all works out.

If we remember that God is Trinity and we are made in the image of that relationality, then we don't have to fit the gender stereotypes. We don't have to worry so much about who we are individually and can focus on who we are as a family, as a community. No matter what we do or what roles we play as individuals, together we can be an image of the Trinity. Together we can take aim at the patriarchy, tear down the hierarchy, and move

towards true equality, all in the name of the Trinity. Think of the implications for society, for our country, for our church family if we would commit to model our lives after God's unity in diversity.

So on this Father's Day and every other day, let's follow Lady Wisdom: "Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord."