

Trinity Sunday Year C 2010

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Psalm 8

Romans 5:1-5

John 16:12-15

Today we are all theologians.

Today we are called,

All of us,

To send questions out into the mystery of God,

To look for traces of God in the world around us,

To find God at the center of our stories.

This is true every day, of course.

Part of growing up into the fullness

Of the faith we embrace

Is taking up the privilege and responsibility

Of becoming theologians,

Inquirers into the nature and activity of God.

Today, when we celebrate the ultimate mystery of God,

Who is three in one,

That brings into focus

The struggle to understand

The incomprehensible God,

A struggle that has held onto

The faithful in every generation

Since there was something

We could call faith.

Faith in something

Has been part of who we are

Since we began to think of ourselves as human,

So the call to be theologians

Goes way back.

It belongs to all of us,

Always.

We just see it more clearly today –
If we look.

Who is God?
How do we know God?
What is God up to in the world?
What kind of world is it?
What does it mean to be human?
What is our relationship with God?

Those are some basic theological questions.
One of the things we celebrate today
Is the sublime effort,
The faithful, hope-filled,
bitter, acrimonious,
contentious, political and spiritual
conversation and wrangling
that brought about the creeds,
and shaped the tradition of the church for centuries.

And there is another set of questions,
Questions that used to seem so obvious
That they hardly deserved an answer,
Questions that now seem absolutely essential,
Since they shape everything that comes after.

How do we go about asking the questions
About who God is and what God does,
About who we are,
About our relationship with God?

Who gets to ask the questions?

And where do the answers come from?
How do we look for the answers?
Are the answers, when they come,
Good for all times and places?

Are there any answers out there anyway?

Whose voice counts more,
And whose less?
Whose voice does not count at all?
Whose voice has never been heard?

In faith,
As in science,
Is there more to know now
Than there was then?

Are questions like this
Scary or exciting?
Is it wrong to ask them,
Or is it our duty and our call,
Our terror and delight?

How will we find out?

The Jesus we come to know in John's gospel,
The Jesus who speaks from beyond his earthly experience
And reveals truth with prophetic power,
That Jesus promised his first followers
That there was more to come.

I still have many things to say to you,
He tells his friends,
But you cannot bear them now.

What are those things?
Are they the same for every person?
For every community?

Are they things that will set us free,
Things that will challenge us,

Things that will call us out into new ways
Of being and becoming?

I hope so.

Our faith is meant to grow,
As we are meant to grow.

But how will it grow?
Strong and secure,
Rooted in scripture
And nourished by tradition
And tempered by reason?

Wide and open enough
To make room
For new voices
And old voices
Heard again now,
As if for the first time?

Gracious and humble and courageous enough
To listen to voices and beliefs
Far different from our own,
Beliefs held with a passion equal to our own?

I hope so.

We don't need to find all the answers today.
It is enough to discover some of the questions.

It is enough to discover some of the questions,
And to honor the answers of an earlier time.

Perhaps, today,
We might think of the creeds
As a set of answers,

A way of approaching the essential questions.

It was a critical time in the development of the church.
A vast array of possible answers to the essential questions
Swirled around those who sought to build
A unified, imperial structure
That would hold the body of Christ together.
Those who gathered in council
Used the best discourse they had,
That of Greek philosophy,
To give shape and meaning
To what they could understand of the mystery.
They defined, with their struggle and their words,
A right way of believing, and a right way of praising God.
That defined, in turn,
Other, or wrong ways of believing.

And here we are,
Centuries later,
Defining ourselves
In relationship to what they said.
Do we stand in continuity with the historic faith of the church?
Do we believe as they believed,
or at least measure ourselves
by means of their words?

Do we see the creeds as the only set of answers,
Or one way of answering the eternal questions?

Might we be on the watch,
Looking for other sets of answers,
Other ways of approaching the essential questions?

Might there be other things
The spirit of Christ reveals to us?

Look at the words of the great English mystic

Julian of Norwich,
Who after the series of visions
That brought her near death,
And transformed her life,
Came to understand Jesus
As our Mother.

Look at the words of the poet
T.S. Eliot,
Who saw Christ as a wounded surgeon,
And the whole earth as his hospital.

Remember what Alice Walker said,
That God is the color purple
Shouting out in the field,
Notice me,
Notice me!

Wonder about what opens up
And shakes loose
When a theologian like Elizabeth Johnson
Begins her work with the Holy Spirit,
Since the invisible Holy Spirit,
Always, as she says,
Drawing near and passing by,
Is our experience of God in the world.

A theology that begins with our experience?
A theology that includes the voices of the many?
A theology that invites us to wonder?

What kind of creed would come from all this?
How might it be in conversation
With the historic faith of the church?

What ways of speaking of the God
Who is unknowable,

And known as three in one,
Might come from all this?

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
We name God today and day by day.
It's one way of trying to approach the mystery.

The early church had other ways
As well,
Images, names, stories.

And the generations between then and now
Have found more ways to name and know
The unnamable, unknown God
Whose true name is a mystery.

And now, it's our turn.
Our turn to question,
Our turn to find images and stories,
Our turn to try to know what cannot be known.

Today, as we celebrate our call
With a host of questions
And only a hint of a set of responses,
There is one thing we can know for sure.

There is one thing
The doctrine of the Trinity
That great mystery we proclaim today,
Tells us for sure.

The essence of the unknowable, unchanging,
Eternal God
Is relationship.

And that relationship reaches out
From a lively and loving center

To draw us in.

Us, with all our questions.

Us, with our great variety of answers.

Us, who still wait,

Wondering about the many things

God is wanting to say.