

Divergence on the Lectionary - Trinity Sunday, Year C

First Reading

Proverbs 8:1–4, 22–31

Does not wisdom call?
Does not understanding raise her voice?
On the heights beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud:
“To you, O men, I call,
and my cry is to the children of man.

*O simple ones, learn prudence;
O fools, learn sense.
Hear, for I will speak noble things,
and from my lips will come what is right,
for my mouth will utter truth;
wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
All the words of my mouth are righteous;
there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.
They are all straight to him who understands,
and right to those who find knowledge.
Take my instruction instead of silver,
and knowledge rather than choice gold,
for wisdom is better than jewels,
and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.*

*“I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,
and I find knowledge and discretion.
The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.
Pride and arrogance and the way of evil
and perverted speech I hate.
I have counsel and sound wisdom;
I have insight; I have strength.
By me kings reign,
and rulers decree what is just;
by me princes rule,*

*and nobles, all who govern justly.
I love those who love me,
and those who seek me diligently find me.
Riches and honor are with me,
enduring wealth and righteousness.
My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,
and my yield than choice silver.
I walk in the way of righteousness,
in the paths of justice,
granting an inheritance to those who love me,
and filling their treasuries.*

“The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of old.
Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth,
before he had made the earth with its fields,
or the first of the dust of the world.
When he established the heavens, I was there;
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
when 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,
then I was beside him, like a master workman,
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the children of man. (ESV)

Second Reading

Romans 5:1–5

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (ESV)

Gospel Text

John 16:12–15

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (ESV)

Comments and Questions for Discussion

My first comment is this: Did they forget that last Sunday was Pentecost, not this Sunday? All three readings are (wonderfully, in my opinion) focused again on the Holy Spirit, or, as She is known in Proverbs, “Wisdom.” And yes, I said “She.” In ordinary usage I tend toward the masculine pronouns for God, but that’s a matter of personal piety, not because I ascribe to God one gender or another. (The story behind that for me is long and not one for sharing.) However, Wisdom is clearly female here. And the Hebrew word for Spirit is “*ruach*,” another feminine noun. And the word for Spirit in Greek is “*pneuma*,” yet another feminine noun. So for the most part, it’s probably more in keeping with Scripture to refer to Holy Spirit as “She” rather than “He.” I first wrote “accurate” in that last sentence, and then I saw the folly of that. It’s not more accurate. Ascribing any specific gender to God is silly and inevitably inaccurate. But then, that’s one of the joys of Trinity Sunday. You can’t seem to avoid one heresy without tripping over another. So let’s move on.

First Reading

As I suggested above, Wisdom is equated by most students of the Bible with the Holy Spirit. Here in this passage it isn't quite as clear that the Holy Spirit is co-eternal with the Father and the Son, but almost. As I usually do, I also included the verses our lectionary folks left out. To be honest, I'm not sure I can figure out what they found objectionable in those verses. Maybe because "wickedness is an abomination," or "I hate evil?" I'm not sure. But these verses only serve to reinforce what I tried to say a couple of weeks ago about the City of God (from Revelation). Wickedness and evil simply cannot co-exist alongside the presence of God. That doesn't mean that we can't, no matter the state of our souls. Only that if we will have the courage to enter in, all that isn't of God in us will melt away, as in a refiner's fire. And the Holy Spirit is the means by which, or by whom, we are enabled to enter into the Presence.

But here's the phrase I'd really like you to carry away with you from the parts that *were* included in this week's reading.

"and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the children of man."

It doesn't say, "I was delighting in them only as long as they did what they were supposed to be doing." It just says that from the moment of creation this Person of the Trinity, God, was delighting in us. I wonder how much differently each of us might behave if we walked in the constant awareness of God's delight in us?

Second Reading

I've read this reading in the past and wondered, "Why is it so hard to delight in my sufferings? I feel like I should be doing better than this."

And that's me, reading it wrong.

Sometimes it pays to read the last page of the book first, to know the punchline before you hear the whole joke. It makes all the other words sound so different. And here's the punchline, "... because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

When I am not able to rejoice in my sufferings, which produce such desirable things in me, it is simply because I am not paying attention. The Holy Spirit will, if I'll allow it, open my heart to receive God's love. Now, in this moment it's not really clear if "God's love" means that God's love for others might have been poured into my heart, so that I

might love with His love. But that's not how Paul uses the phrase. If you look up every other occurrence of "*he agape tou theou*" in Paul's writings, he refers to something given to us to *affect us*, not (immediately at least) for the sake of others.

And this love goes so far beyond what we usually understand what it is to be "loved." It is infinitely tender and at the same time a terrifyingly fierce. It humbles us only to exalt us to the heavenlies with Christ. It makes our sufferings feel inconsequential except that they make us stronger.

This isn't to say that they lead us to put up with them as if they were just, or simply inescapable. On the contrary, there is no one more dangerous to an unjust system than a person who knows who she is before God, and the delight (see how I did that?) He takes in her. She won't put up with injustice, with treatment that belittles her standing before God. Or that of any other person, for that matter!

Gospel Text

You and I can argue the truth of our proclamations about the identity of Jesus and the Love of God that He manifests to the world for days, weeks, months with others without ever enabling them to know those words to be true. Only the Holy Spirit does that. We might convince someone that our arguments are compelling (though frankly, Paul gave up on that after Athens, it just didn't produce results) but to "know the truth" about Who Jesus Is is to have one's entire world view shifted from whatever we hold to one in which Creation is governed first and foremost by mercy. Unmerited mercy borne of ineluctable love. And that kind of revelation isn't one you can be talked into. This is why we were given the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, to reveal to us things we can't bring ourselves to think.

And this is why I am so convinced that Spirit led worship is so important. I love Episcopal liturgies but if I hadn't encountered the Holy Spirit in other worship I doubt I'd have found Her the way that I have in ours. I don't suggest abandoning the Book of Common Prayer, but I do long to see us complement that with other forms that give more Holy Spirit more room to move. It is in these encounters I find that we have our world views shifted (usually in pieces not all at once, God is patient and kind) and our hearts opened to the Truth. ("I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life.) Spirit led worship is often messy, and that doesn't bode well for "good liturgy." But until we figure out how to bring them both into the same space, I truly wish we'd make room for messy worship alongside our good liturgies.