

**The Sunday Missive – June 4, 2023**  
**Trinity Sunday**

**Hymn 371 Thou whose almighty word**

Thou, whose almighty word chaos and darkness heard,  
And took their flight; hear us, we humbly pray,  
And, where the Gospel day sheds not its glorious ray,  
Let there be light!

Thou who didst come to bring on thy redeeming wing  
Healing and sight, heal to the sick in mind,  
Sight to the inly blind, now to all humankind,  
Let there be light!

Spirit of truth and love, life-giving holy Dove,  
Speed forth thy flight! Move on the waters' face  
Bearing the gifts of grace, and, in earth's darkest place,  
Let there be light!

Holy and blessèd Three, glorious Trinity,  
Wisdom, Love, Might; boundless as ocean's tide,  
Rolling in fullest pride, through the world far and wide,  
Let there be light!

**The Collect of the Day**

Almighty and everlasting God, you have given to us your servants  
grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory  
of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of your divine Majesty to  
worship the Unity: Keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and  
bring us at last to see you in your one and eternal glory, O Father;  
who with the Son and the Holy Spirit live and reign, one God, for  
ever and ever. *Amen.*

## **Genesis 1:1-2:4a**

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness.

And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; female and male he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. God

saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

### **Psalm 8**

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth\* ***You have set your glory above the heavens.***

Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark\* ***To silence the enemy and the oppressor.***

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers\* ***The moon and the stars that you have established;***

What are human beings that you are mindful of us\* ***Mere mortals that you care for us?***

Yet you have made us little lower than gods\* ***And crowned us with glory and honor.***

You have given us dominion over the works of your hands\* ***You have put all things under our feet,***

All sheep and oxen\* ***And also the beasts of the field,***

The birds of the air, and the fish of the sea\* ***Whatever passes along the paths of the seas.***

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth\* ***You have set your glory above the heavens.***

## **2 Corinthians 13:5-14**

Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? —unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test! I hope you will find out that we have not failed.

But we pray to God that you may not do anything wrong—not that we may appear to have met the test, but that you may do what is right, though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. For we rejoice when we are weak and you are strong. This is what we pray for, that you may become perfect. So I write these things while I am away from you, so that when I come, I may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord has given me for building up and not for tearing down.

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

### **Wonder, Love and Praise Hymn 746 God the sculptor of the mountains**

God the sculptor of the mountains, God the miller of the sand,  
God the jeweler of the heavens, God the potter of the land:  
You are womb of all creation, we are formless; shape us now.

God the dresser of the vineyard, God the planter of the wheat,  
God the reaper of the harvest, God the source of all we eat:  
You are host at every table, we are hungry; feed us now.

## **Matthew 28:16-20**

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

### **Community of Three – Trinity A**

One hot summer day, Michelangelo was pushing an enormous chunk of marble towards his studio on the Via dei Medici. One of the citizenry, enjoying the shade from a nearby building, watched for a while and called out to the artist, "That doesn't look like much fun, why work so hard for a big old rock?" At this, Michelangelo stopped to rest, caught his breath, turned his gaze to the fellow and replied, "Ah, but you see there is an angel within this stone and I must set it free."

Nöone knows what angels are to be set free in our own lifetimes, nor when our own opportunities will arise to be part of their liberation, but surely the meaning and excitement we find in life is in pursuit of such enterprise: To participate in the becoming of the world. This Trinity Sunday affords us an opportunity to consider how the uniquely Christian conception of Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer – the Trinity -- works to help us in such participation; how it helps us be co-creators of what is to be instead of just sitting in the shade and watching the big rocks go by.

The understanding we know as Trinity is not just a philosophical exercise, a mysterious way of describing the indescribable, although we can be forgiven for thinking so. When we do, we are in good company. As James Adams observes, Jesus preferred the company of doubters to that of believers. Understanding that Jesus recruited people capable of doubt and let the people of faith

go on about their business can be very reassuring. If we can picture ourselves to be the sort of people Jesus liked to have around, we may be able to hear what Jesus has to teach.

C. S Lewis' insight both validates our lack of immediate clarity and challenges us to keep looking: "I have five senses; an incurably abstract intellect; a haphazard memory; a set of preconceptions and assumptions so numerous that I can never examine more than a minority of them – never become conscious of them all. How much of total reality can such an apparatus let through?"

What might be the greatest puzzle of Christianity is also its most useful idea. Christians assert that there is one living and unique God who is at once three individuals but of a single substance: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit We say so all the time. Furthermore, Christians hold that those three are all faces of one God, whose divine qualities, indivisibility, perfection, and powers pertain to all of them equally. Their names, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not meant to be designations of gender, and are not different names of the same person in different relations, but of different persons. These three divine persons are distinguished from one another by certain personal properties, and are revealed in a certain order of substance and of operation. This all sounds pretty deep; a philosophical, theological, ontological triathlon as far from the capabilities of most of us as was the recent Ironman. What good does it do anyone?

One answer, that may seem like a straw being grasped, but does offer help is this. When engaged in a pursuit as impossible as the full understanding and thorough description of God, the Trinity teaches us to humbly accept reality. We can only resort to analogies, metaphors, and examples. We have to be creative, persistent and forgiving of ourselves and one another. We can't reason God or capture God, so we have to live with God's unknowability and share experiences of God with each other. There is the shamrock, and there is water, ice and vapor, three different things but one substance. There is the 'Rule of Three' in

comedy, Bingo Bango Bongo, and a beginning, a middle and an end to every good story. The truth is that God emerges from these efforts as a verb, not a noun. What goes on within the Trinity, among the persons of God is energetic, continuous, creative activity.

Rather than explaining the Trinity, we can let the Trinity explain us. We too are always changing. As the feller says, "The universe itself keeps on expanding and expanding in all of the directions it can whiz." Likewise we are always moving from what we have been to what we are becoming; from rocks into angels, one might hope. Everything is involved in this process; being is a matter of always becoming; time is very much reflective of what we are experiencing. Each action we perform is already in the past, and each ensuing one is in the future, such that one could say there is no such thing as the present for us to wallow and get stuck in.

The prospect of uncontrollable, unplannable, irresistible change, can be a frightening one. But the Trinity lets us know that our being as becoming mirrors the order of ultimate truth, the way things happen with God too. And even though this truth is beyond our intellectual reach, it is working out its purpose for our good. The Trinity does not allow things to stand still. Like a shark in the sea, whatever does not move dies. Just as God is an active verb within the divine being, so we must live and move and have our being.

How then shall we live? How to live with evil is the big question. Injustice, hunger, violence, propaganda, genocide on the grand scale, and ill-fortune, accident, illness and death in individual lives are all part of this moving reality. What happens, happens here, not in heaven or hell. Whatever our particulars, most of us know we cannot continue in a world without truth. No matter how crazy circumstances become, no matter how tragic, no matter how many thieves and murderers and phonies there are and what success they have, the reality of truth stays in our senses and holds us to our responsibilities. This is why dismay, disgust and



outrage are such natural and godly responses to politically powerful prevaricators at home and abroad.

The Trinity expresses the mystery of that reality for the whole world, for all people in all times and in all places: Wisdom, Love, and Might are always swirling onward. Even when it seems like everything is a matter of pure chance, and that the sooner we all get that straight, the better, the reality of the triune God is not disturbed, it only becomes more compelling.

Meister Eckhardt only half joked when he suggested, “God laughed and the Son came into being; the two of them laughed together and thereby the Spirit was made manifest; then the three of them all laughed and humanity was born.

We saw the live action *Little Mermaid* this week and were amazed and delighted at the technology and the artistry. Surely there is a Trinitarian element in this tale, beyond Ariel’s father King Triton, son of Poseidon, both of whom carried the three-pronged family implement of choice.

We all know the story, a mermaid falls in love with a human and their families do everything they can to keep them apart, for reasons good and bad. Luckily the non-human forces of nature conspire and collaborate to bring the two together and the disparate worlds are reconciled by the spirit of love. Lots of imagery, both playful and terrifying contribute to the storytelling, but the underlying message is that two separate realms exist, under the sea and up on the rocks and it is the wonder of love (based in nature) that removes all the obstacles to their joyful coexistence.

The implication, of course is that a new world will be created, one where this spirit of love will have more sway. Those resistant to change and those who would poison and destroy are unwitting allies in obstructing creation, but the spirit of love overcomes them to allow the future to come into being.

It's all about community, and every community has three elements, even the smallest one, the one in our own heads. Those three are: 1. What we want, 2. What others expect of us and 3. The desire we have to reconcile the other two. Or, as St. Augustine put it, whenever there is an occurrence of love, there are three entities: the lover, the beloved and the love itself. None of us is capable of purifying our desires entirely – even the most kindly-intentioned can get things wrong when it comes to other people's needs and desires. But the ability and opportunity for reconciliation is surely the great desire of the godly: we wish we were wise enough to know what's going on in the dark; loving enough to heal even those we would hate; strong enough to bear witness to the persistence of love beyond the fragility of earthly life. And we offer our praise for the assurance of cosmic goodness, for the triune community that is God.

“Orthodoxy” means “Right Praise.” At a certain point we realize that this attempt at a characterization of God with three entities in one identity is blended, even kaleidoscopic, it is also meet and right. Right because it acknowledges and celebrates the deepest truth: No one can define God. And meet because it bears witness to our experience of life. God is everywhere and nowhere. God is completely with us and completely apart. God is utterly powerful and does nothing without our cooperation. When the day begins and when the day is done, and anytime in-between when our challenges exceed our capacity to control their outcome, the only thing we can surely do is praise: surrender to praise; rejoice in our ability to praise, and then simply be still and know that all will be well somehow.

### **Hymn 362 Holy, holy, holy**

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.  
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,  
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

Holy, holy, holy! All saints adore thee,  
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;  
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,  
Which wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,  
Though the sinful human eye thy glory may not see,  
Only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,  
Perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
All thy works shall praise thy Name, in earth, and sky, and sea;  
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty,  
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity.

## **The Wild Swans**

Before daybreak the breezes whisper  
through the trellis at my window;

they interrupt and carry off my dream,  
and he of whom I dreamed  
vanishes from me.

I climb upstairs  
to look from the topmost window,  
but with whom? . . .

I remember how I used to stir the fire  
with my hairpin of jade  
as I am doing now . . .  
but the brazier holds nothing but ashes.

I turn to look at the mountain;  
there is a thick mist,  
a dismal rain,  
and I gaze down at the wind-dappled river,  
the river that flows past me forever  
without bearing away my sorrow.

I have kept the rain of my tears  
on the crape of my tunic;  
with a gesture I fling these bitter drops  
to the wild swans on the river,  
that they may be my messengers.

Li Qingzhao  
translated from the French of Judith Gautier  
by James Whittall