

Trinity Sunday 2011 *“The Blessing of God”*

A few years ago I had the privilege of sharing breakfast, along with 15 or so other pastors, with the New Testament scholar, N. T. Wright. Since 2003 he has served as Bishop of Durham Cathedral in England.

Bishop Wright was talking about the purpose of reading scripture in worship. It's not, he said, to simply tell a portion of the story for us to take in, analyze and conjecture about. As we hear it read, it is like pressing your nose into a window to get a closer look at the glory and love of God.

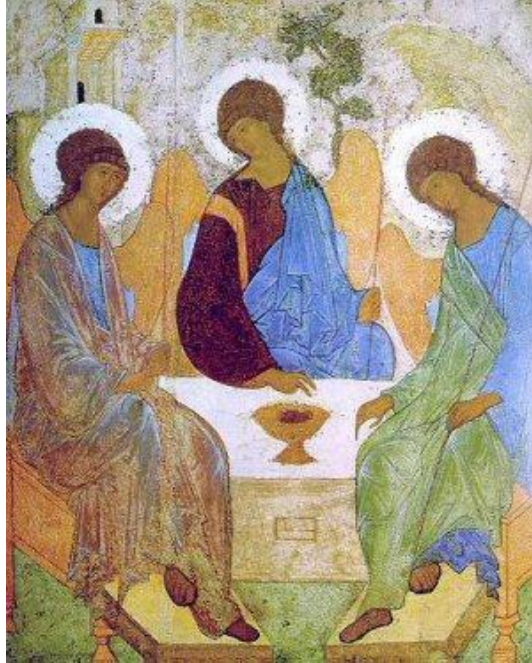
If that's so, then this morning's reading from Genesis is a pretty big window! And we get an amazing picture. I think of two different images – the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel where the hand of God is extended out to touch Ad-am; and Mickey Mouse in the Sorcerer's Apprentice, waving the wand and conjuring up a mess!

God's creation, initially, is perfect, good, complete, whole. God makes humankind in God's image (the word in Greek is *icon*). And this creativity is work that requires rest, Sabbath. God begins our life with the hospitality of the earth and a place for everything and being in creation. It/we/God – all are glorious and loved indeed! What a planet we inhabit! What beautiful creatures abound! What wonderful rocks, hills, mountains and seas – a window into the glory of the Creator!

On the Olympic peninsula in Western Washington there is a small Episcopal Church that was built in the late 1990's. The interior features light stained wood all around. It seats about 100 people in comfortable cushioned chairs and has clear windows from ceiling to about a foot above the floor so the space is bathed in abundant light and looks out on the surrounding landscape and forest, the beauty of God's creation.

When you enter this peaceful beautiful space your eyes are immediately drawn to the space above the altar. Instead of the usual cross (like our celtic stone cross), there is an enlarged image of this icon that is placed before you today. It is breathtaking and communicates about the God of love in an expansive and compelling way. This icon is what has pulled this community into faith and discipleship.

Just as scripture is written by those inspired by Divine love and grace, so it is with icons. They are written by iconographers, to invite us deeper into God's being and love which surrounds us. This one, you may know, was written by the Russian Anton Rublev in 1425. Like scripture we are invited to press our noses into this window to get a closer look at the glory and love of God.



Let me walk about with it and invite your gaze into this window.

What do you see?

- three angels around a table
- what appears to be a chalice (blood of Christ?)
- an open side to the table (your place!)
- a tree and a house in the background

Rublev titled this icon “The Trinity”. And he set the image within the story of Abraham and Sarah found in Genesis 18. Three strangers appear to them in the desert. At Abraham’s invitation they sit under the Oak of Mamre, are fed a meal by Sarah, and in the midst of that extended hospitality, they share the news that at long last Sarah will conceive a child, even in her advanced age. She laughs and later her son is named Isaac (he laughs). God is intimately involved in their lives, transforming them. And there is a reciprocating hospitality. They welcome the trinity of God into their home, just as God welcomes them and their life is changed forever.

Several thousand years later, a transformed Jewish rabbi gathers with his close followers before his final departure. He commissions them as his emissaries, to go into the world to share what he has taught them about the love, mercy and compassion of God. *“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, teaching them to observe all the things that I commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

This quote from Matthew has been the rallying cry for mission for centuries. We’ve turned it, however, into a kind of charter for the church and focused our efforts on ourselves. Baptism has become a rite of entrance into the church for individuals who then have access to all the rights

and privileges of becoming followers of Christ. And we send missionaries into foreign lands to convert people to our understanding of what that all means.

As many modern missional writers have pointed out, it's a much bigger commission than that. Jesus sends us out into the world for nations, not individuals. It's as if he's encouraging us to get out on Main Street after this worship service with Holy Water and start spreading it all over the place, blessing people in the name of the Trinity of God – the love that gives us life, the creative force behind our humanity, and self-emptying life that transforms us and makes us into beings in union with this Trinity.

You likely know that the Vestry has been reading “Missional Renaissance” by Reggie McNeal. He's not an Episcopalian so we have to translate his ideas into our own culture, but he's provocative in his invitation for the community of faith to face outward – to travel like these angels in the desert – to accept and give hospitality and blessing to all we encounter; to listen and see that God is already working this mission in the world and is there ahead of us, to greet us as we go. Christ accompanies us on the way and we encounter and grow closer to him as we risk sharing God's blessing with the world.

Rublev's icon shows us that the Trinity of God is not a theoretical construct, but a lived reality of a community of love that is shared in the world. That is the reality of the glory of God through this window. We are invited to not only press our nose up against the window, but to walk through it to dwell in the house of God which is love – to live our life centered in this house – to go into our homes, offices, stores, schools with this house surrounding us. And to invite others into the hospitality of God's love and blessing. From this house, there is nothing we need fear. There is no danger we cannot face, no grief or sorrow or pain that cannot be transformed. Evil has no ultimate power in God's house of love as long as we live in it.

Saint Sergius, in whose honor and memory Rublev painted the Trinity icon, wanted to bring all of Russia together in God to conquer “the devouring hatred of the world by the contemplation of the Holy Trinity”.

It still invites that. Our world is full of destruction and sorrow and grief. But, through Jesus, we know that we do not need to fear. Those of us who have come here are hungry for the living God to be active in our lives. This icon sends us out back into a world where that God is active. Throughout the whole creation, through the act of creation, through hospitality, through love, through forgiveness, through blessing, through the rest of Sabbath, through the water of baptism, through our daily work, a simple touch, a phone call from a friend, God in Christ is here, now, surrounding all of us, bathing us with love and inviting us to bless the world in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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