

God in Wisdom through Spirit

by the Rev. Dr. Paul S. Nancarrow

Jesus said “The Spirit of truth will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

There is an entire theology of the Trinity written in miniature in those two verses from our Gospel reading today. This handful of words shows divine *activity* circulating through three distinct but related *ways of acting*, and they show that divine activity reaching out to include us in divine love.

Jesus says “All that the Father has is mine.” That’s a way of saying that the attributes of God are also attributes of Jesus, that God’s way of being God is also Jesus’ way of being human, that the love and creativity and justice and peace and righteousness and life-giving power that make God God are also what make Jesus Jesus. It’s a way of saying that all the fullness of God comes forth to be known as God in the human life and work and person of Jesus.

It’s like what we see in the First Testament reading today, where all the fullness of God’s creativity and love is expressed through the personification of Wisdom. Wisdom says “God established me at the beginning, as the first divine activity. When God created the universe, I was there,” Wisdom says, “and it was through me that God created. I was at God’s side like a master worker,” Wisdom says, “and God’s delight was in me, and I delighted in the human race.” Wisdom speaks of herself here as the activity of God in creation, as God’s own powerful presence in what makes reality real. Wisdom is not just a creature of God, but *is* God, God’s way of acting as God in Creation.

Now if that Hebrew Scripture language about Wisdom being with God in the beginning seems familiar to us Christians, there’s a good reason for that. It’s because that’s how John in his Gospel begins his story of Jesus. You remember the beginning of John: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were created through the Word. And the Word became flesh and lived among us.” John speaks of the active presence of God in Jesus in just the same way Proverbs speaks of the active presence of God in Creation. In fact, scripture scholar Marcus Borg (along with many others) says that John probably had this Proverbs passage in mind when he wrote the prologue of his Gospel. There was a whole Jewish tradition about Wisdom as God’s way of acting in the world, and scholars think that John was drawing on this tradition when he wrote about the Word in his prologue. In that sense, we wouldn’t be too far off the beam if we were to re-read the beginning of John’s Gospel to say “In the beginning was Wisdom, and Wisdom was with God, and Wisdom was God. All things were created through Wisdom. And Wisdom became flesh and lived among us.” In John’s way of thinking, Jesus is the human embodiment of the Wisdom of God. Jesus is the human expression of the love and creativity and justice and peace and righteousness and life-giving power of God, right here beside us in the midst of all the mess and crush and craziness of real human life. Jesus is the living proof that God’s Wisdom is not high and mighty and far away from us, but God’s Wisdom can be with us in every moment of every experience of every day. It is because Jesus is the incarnation of the Wisdom of God that he can say “All that the Father has is mine.”

But if that’s all there were to the story, if the Gospel was that God comes forth as Wisdom and Wisdom is incarnate in Jesus, and nothing more, then it wouldn’t really be very good news for us. Just knowing that God is acting in Jesus as Wisdom doesn’t help us much, because we all know that *knowing* and *doing* aren’t always the same thing. The problem with human life, the problem that makes our lives so much less than they could be, so much less than God wants them to be—the problem the Christian tradition calls “sin”—is that we are separated from God, we are alienated from God, there is a gap

between what God wants and what we do, a gap between what we know of God's goodness and what we act out in our actions, a gap between how God loves us and how we return that love. St Paul describes that gap in Romans, in one of the most poignant passages in all of scripture: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members." Paul makes it so clear that we can *know* what God wants, but that doesn't mean we can always *do* it. And if we *know* that Jesus is God's Wisdom incarnate, that's all very well and good, but it doesn't really save us until we can also *do* it, until that Wisdom becomes present and active and creative and loving in *us*, too.

And that's why Jesus says, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will take what is mine and declare it to you." The Wisdom that belongs to God, the Wisdom that is incarnate in Jesus, that same Wisdom is declared to us, poured into us, made real and living and active in us, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit forms in us the attributes, the love and creativity and justice and peace and righteousness and life-giving power that we see revealed in Jesus, that ultimately come forth from God. And that is what overcomes the gap between us and God, that is what completes the circle of salvation: when, as Paul says in today's Epistle, "God's love is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that is given to us." We are saved, we are healed, we are started on the path that brings us to wholeness, when the Holy Spirit begins to form in us the Wisdom that was incarnate in Jesus that belongs to God.

But what does that look like? We can talk about the work of the Trinity, we say that it is the threefold way of acting of God to be, and to be Wisdom, and to be Wisdom in us. We can say the words, we can repeat the Nicene Creed, and the words are very theological and very inspiring and sometimes even poetic. But after we speak the poetry, after we ponder the theology, after we finish the liturgy and go out into the world to live—what does the threefold work of God in us *look* like? What difference does this teaching of the Trinity really make?

I think the difference that it makes is to remind us that when we do works of ministry, when we go forth in mission, when we reach out to others in service, it's not just we who are doing it, but it is God active in Wisdom poured into us by the Spirit that is making it happen. The works we do are not simply our own, but are the Trinity at work in and around and through us. When we serve Noon Lunch, bringing together teams from many churches with guests from all over the city, that is the Trinity, God in Wisdom through Spirit, at work. When we send eight members of the Haiti Collaborative of which our church is a member on a mission trip to Haiti in a couple of weeks, that will be the Trinity, God in Wisdom through Spirit, at work. When we make a donation to support cleanup crews working to alleviate the oil spill washing ashore on the delicate ecosystems of the Louisiana coast, or lobby for greater safety measures and environmental protections on offshore drilling, because we care for God's Creation, that is the Trinity, God in Wisdom through Spirit, at work. All the things we do—all the prayers, all the visits, all the giving, all the serving, all the caring, all the random acts of kindness, all the senseless acts of beauty, all the sufferings that lead to endurance that lead to character that lead to hope, all of them, no matter how seemingly insignificant—all the things we do add up to grace, add up to salvation, because it is God in Wisdom through Spirit who is at work in us. That is the difference the teaching of the Trinity makes.

Jesus said "The Spirit of truth will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." May Jesus be glorified, in Spirit and in truth and in us, to the thanks and praise of God. Amen.