

May 30, 2010
United Church of Northfield
John 16: 12-15 Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31, Psalm 8

Trinity: God's Communal Identity
Rev. Roger L. Brown

Introduction

Water is the most amazing substance on earth. Water is the source and force of all life. Before there was anything else on earth there were great and vast seas. It was in the primordial soup of the Earth's giant oceans that life began. Life began and evolved in the oceans of the Earth, and the water was the source of life. What is it that is so magical about water that it can sustain and be the source of life? While I'm going to resist the temptation to give a physical chemistry lesson on water, I want to explore with you its nature for a few minutes.

Everyone knows the simple formula for water – "H" 2 "O". The formula has even entered common language – "hey, get me some H two O!" Water is a trinity of molecules. Three of them – one Oxygen and two Hydrogen. Two Hydrogen molecules – the simplest molecule you can get – are held by a single Oxygen atom, like a football player holding two young children, one in each arm.

Water is a little trinity of atoms that is the key to all life. Yet water turns up in different forms that make it interesting and useful. We see this as the seasons come and go. In this endearing seasons of Spring and Summer, water makes the flowers grow and provides us lakes to swim in. In winter, the water turns to ice and snow – good for skiing and skating. At other times, water gathers up as fog hovering over a river, and coalescing into a cloud. Some of us even use the steam form of water to cook our vegetables – a very good method that cooks without removing the nutrients.

The three forms of water – liquid, gas or steam, and solid or ice – are critical for the survival of life on earth. These forms of water make possible the eternal water cycle. When water evaporates from lakes and oceans, it goes into the air to form clouds. The clouds, as you know, carry the water to new areas of the Earth, and then the water comes out of the cloud as rain. Then the rain will feed the plants and animals and life can continue. That's the life-giving water cycle.

Vermont Public Radio Story

Earlier this week, I was listening to a program called "The Story" on Vermont Public Radio. The interviewer was talking with a doctor and his wife who had moved their life to Tanzania, to help poor village people. He told the story of how the villagers had brought in an unconscious young girl for treatment. The doctor's immediate reaction was that this girl needed to go immediately to ICU or she would die in hours from dehydration. There was no hospital and no ICU. There was no way to start an IV. So they just poured water down the girl's throat, slowly, gently, for hours. Then suddenly, the girl sat up, jumped off the table and was fine. Yes, water is the stuff of life!

Trinity Sunday Connection

This Sunday is Trinity Sunday, the day we celebrate our God who shows himself in three forms. Trinity Sunday always comes after Pentecost, and the scriptures for this day may or may not clearly elaborate the nature of the Trinity. The idea that God can be three and yet be one is sometimes puzzling to us. I think, however, that God has a good thing going.. We know the classical formula for the Trinity – Father, Son, Holy Spirit

Father, Son, Holy Spirit

This very common description of God is relatively easy for us to think about. In simple terms, the Father is the God of the Old Testament. The Son is Jesus Christ, the one sent to

be with us in the flesh. The Holy Spirit we talked about last Sunday as the part of God who could dwell within us and through us and help us to do godly things. This morning I want to elaborate briefly about other ways of experiencing and knowing the Trinity.

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer

In the hymn which follows the sermon, we will sing of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. These are ways of describing God in terms of what he does – create, redeem, sustain. In this description of the Trinity we name the actions of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is creator. Jesus is redeemer, and the Spirit is Sustainer.

Scripture Connection Psalm 8

Our Proverbs text for this day speaks of the creative acts of God. The proverb speaks of God's acts of creating with Wisdom as his partner. Psalm 8 speaks of the wonder of God's creation:

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, *
the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,

What is man that you should be mindful of him? *
the son of man that you should seek him out?

Jesus, as savior and redeemer has given us grace to set us free. As the lexionary text in Romans 5 says, "Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, " The Holy Spirit, as sustainer, keeps us alive, like the water of life.

Trinity Concept from the Children's Time

During our time with the children this morning, Bonnie Gayle shared another view of the Trinity which I had never thought about, but which I think is very neat and very helpful. She views the Creator side of God as the Sun. The Sun sends out energy – fancy things called photons – which make life possible when they hit the green leaves of all our Earthly plants. The wonderful thing is that we can see the Sun and we can see the result of its presence – especially this time of year when everything is growing so fast all around us.

Next, Bonnie suggested that the warmth of the Sun which we experience as the second part of the Trinity – the second way we experience God. What does warmth mean. Warmth means good feelings; warmth means we feel good and we are comfortable. (That is we are "comforted.") These experiences of "warmth" are experiences we can have when we connect with Jesus and his teachings. When we follow his way we will be well. Life will be warm, not cold and hostile. When we experience Jesus' love for us, we will be warmed in our heart of hearts. It is no wonder that my cat "Blackie" will stretch out in the rays of the sun in the summer and in front of the hot air register in winter!

Finally, Bonnie suggested that "light" represents the Holy Spirit. Light is a really, really good analogy to the Holy Spirit! Think about it. You cannot really see light. You cannot really see the tiny tiny photons dancing through the air as they come from the Sun. What you can see, however, are things that the photons illuminate – the trees, the people, the houses, What you can SEE is the result of the photon's work when it hits a leaf on a tree and starts the process of photosynthesis, so the tree can grow and live.

In the same way, you cannot see the Holy Spirit, but you can see the works of the spirit in the lives of the people the Spirit touches. You can see the "spirit of truth" as people live out their lives guided by the wisdom of God.

Conclusion

In Ecclesiastes it says the following: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12
Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their work:

If one falls down,
his friend can help him up.
But pity the man who falls
and has no one to help him up!

Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.
But how can one keep warm alone?

Though one may be overpowered,
two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

But I believe three is better than two. See, the scripture here says, "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." With two, you can have a tug-of-war, pulling in opposite directions, living in tension. But with three, there is always a third to balance out the other. We need water in all three of its forms, liquid, gas, solid. Without the gas form of water, we could not have rain and without rain, everything on earth would die. For the water needs to be able to turn into gas, to go into the sky to become clouds. Then from the clouds it can rain back to earth to nourish the ground and the plants and the people once more.

The Trinity in its many forms helps us to connect with and to know God. Some people connect most meaningfully to God through nature – through God's greatness of creation. They say, "I find God on the mountain top!" (That's ok, I say, but don't spend your life there.) The good thing is that people who love nature can easily connect with God the Creator!

Many people connect with God through their spiritual relationship with Jesus. Jesus is as real to them as a close friend. They can talk to him as a close friend and walk with him as a gentle companion. They come to know God through Jesus' life and teaching. And Jesus' teachings are God's teachings. What a great way to experience our ultimate spiritual goal – closeness to God.

Still other people are moved by the Holy Spirit. They are directed and guided, comforted and helped by the Spirit. What a wonderful connection to God.

God is certainly mysterious, and difficult to fully know. However, the Trinity – God in three forms, helps us to see and know God in spite of his being hidden and mysterious. So we shall sing in our closing hymn of praise: "Holy, Holy, Holy, God almighty, blessed Trinity!"