

The Divine Dance

The Trinity—that theological doctrine that we use to describe the indescribable...to explain the mystery that God has revealed to us throughout history by establishing covenantal relationship with us—beings that God created...is it any wonder that the psalmist as he looked at creation said, “what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals, that you care for them?” And yet, our scriptures reveal to us over and over again that truth about our God...again and again...that is clear...God’s persistent efforts to be in covenant relationship with the beings he created is the story our scriptures reveal and is the basis from which the image of the Trinity was formed. Yet, because we are the created beings, not the Creator, the images are never capable of capturing the total, so there is always mystery. This idea of three in one or one in three parts...we aren’t really sure which. Often we use simple images to demonstrate the concept...the most common one is probably the three leaf clover...a friend more mathematically inclined likes something called a fractal triangle...here are prints of both types of images where three and one are present within one...each distinct, separate in some one but within a one...but neither really captures what is revealed in Scripture. Then there is the fancy theological term from the Greek—peri-choresis—which is used to describe the Trinity and means a mutual indwelling, a mutual interpenetration of the three members of the Trinity with each other...and the best description or interpretation that I was given of that term was that it was a divine dance, and thus the title of this meditation. The image of three somewhat nebulous forms to my mind bound together by love in a dance which overflowed and that overflowing of love was a boundless and everflowing stream of creation. But fancy or simple, the images we create are just that...creations of our mind...what is more important is the revelation found in the narrative story we have in our scriptures which have been given to us by our Lord. Today we will walk through some of those revelations which have led to the understanding that we have beginning with Genesis and the foundation that God spoke creation into being. The first thing revealed to us about God through scripture was this desire of God to create. Genesis 1:1—In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The story of God’s relationship with humanity begins with God creating—and in the Hebrew we have the word ruah רוח, God’s ruah moving over the water. Ruah has many meanings—it is wind, it is breath, it is spirit. So initially we have God’s breath, God’s spirit moving. And then we are told the creation comes into being by the word...and God said. And the Word that is said is not one of command, but one of permission—an “Let there be...an invitation and the invitation was answered and what came into being was pronounced good. Although not named as such, all the elements later seen as Triune—were present in the story told of creation—the power of creation was done not so much in a way that compelled creation to exist, but invited creation to join God in the space which God occupied. God desired to have company. Note the

repetition of the word “let” at each stage of the creation story...God chooses not to demand and control creation but to bless it. Three times we hear God offer blessings to the living creatures, to humanity and to the Sabbath. The entire divine endeavor is not one of dominance but of gracious self-giving from the beginning. In this story of Genesis we have presented the first chapter of the delicate dance that has occurred and is continuing to occur between God and the created world. It is subtle engaging and beautiful. The source of all power—Almighty God—is ever so gingerly fashioning a time and a space for all of this to occur, as if a set of cupped hands were opened, allowing a butterfly to fly free. We often find this frustrating in a time of crisis when we wish God would intervene with a heavy and forceful hand on our behalf. But God chooses not to order the world in a lockstep fashion, shrink wrapping all of us into place, preventing all from harm. This delicate dance of God’s blessing was imbued into creation from its beginning; the invitation to join in God’s dance is always present, as is seen through God’s continued acts through the covenant made with Abraham, the giving of the Law and the forming of the nation of Israel, and most notably in the revelation present in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of the second person of the Trinity who we name the Word of God. God chooses not to dominate, but to invite us into right relationship. Not manipulating but encouraging us. Not forcing us but inspiring us to be who we were created to be...children of God. We were created in God’s image and thus given the freedom that comes with such autonomy. God has created remarkable space for us full of beauty and wonder, the physical world, and has given us through the Son, an example—a guide for how to live in that world in right relationship with our God and with each other. As the gospel of John so beautifully put it: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through him.” Although we often don’t pay attention to it, the prophets of Israel clearly relate to the people that the message they bring is the Word of God. They tell the people the message they bring comes to them from the Word of God, or that the Spirit of God has brought them this message or showed them this vision. In the valley of the dry bones, the Spirit of the Lord brings the prophet to the valley in a vision, there Ezekiel is told to give the word of the Lord to the dry bones, and he obeys. In the end, it is the calling of the Spirit, the breath of the Lord which gives life to the bones which have been assembled according to the word of the Lord spoken by the prophet. The final words of that chapter are again a promise from God to open the graves of Israel: “I will put my spirit within you and you shall live.” It seems no matter how dry our bones become, God does not withdraw the invitation for us to join in the relationship. Long after Ezekiel, Jesus was born in Bethlehem. And still many do not respond to the invitation found in the teachings of Jesus, those expressed as loving neighbor, as offering forgiveness without counting, of repenting of wrongs, of seeing injustice and tending to the vulnerable, those things which Jesus described as signs of the reign of God. The gospel

passage for today is Matthew's description of the ascension during which Jesus gave the disciples what is called the "Great Commission". "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." As disciples we have enthusiastically adopted three of those clauses in the great commission. In the name of Christ we have made disciples throughout the world but often without remembering the commandment about love. We have adopted baptism, but have made it into a source of conflict, instead of a symbol of adoption into the body of Christ. We have adopted using the naming of our Lord as Triune without understanding the mystery of love which it describes. Finally, we have been able to teach the words of Jesus without teaching disciples to seek to obey them in their daily lives as they interact with one another and the world. In the Hebrew, one of the frequently used terms for the Lord is plural: Elohem. There is a consistent and persistent revelation and invitation from our God for us to be in this relationship which is revealed through the texts. Going back to the Genesis passage: verse 26: "Let us make humankind in OUR image, according to **our** likeness." Our. Not my. Our. Take note of that. And ponder it carefully. From the beginning we have been made in the image of our God whose self-image was plural. That is our problem. We cannot seem to have a self-image that is anything but singular and selfish. That is why what is called by John Calvin the Oneness of the Three or the Threeness of the One is such a mystery for us. When we look at others we see "other", separate, not a part of ourselves unless we can see an immediate biological connection. We need to remember that when God looks at humanity God sees what we find in that 26th verse: all of humanity is found in that image of God, there is no separation; we are all indeed God's beloved and all are invited to join in the divine dance of overflowing love and oneness. May the Pentecost Spirit come and dwell with us and give us the vision to see and accept the invitation. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.