

If you think I'm here and explain Holy Trinity, I am is that I have tried not been not compelling. with similar

Grace Episcopal Church Galena, Illinois
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Sermon by Rev. Dr. Gloria G. Hopewell
Proverbs 8: 1-4, 22-31

going to stand conclusively the not. One reason before, and it has particularly Others have tried results. That's

because it is not really possible. In a sense, any such attempt is an analogy of analogy, a metaphor of a metaphor. I mean no disrespect: yes, the Trinity is ancient, a doctrine, a mystery, part of our creed. Still, it is simply the best description humans have come up with to explain what Jesus was about and what his relationship is with God, something that is ultimately beyond human understanding.

All who have tried seem to have fallen into one of the heresies: modalism, Arianism, partialism, and on this Memorial Day weekend, after a week of the tragedy of the tornados in Oklahoma and a week of great celebration in Marsha's ordination to the priesthood, I simply do not intend to try!

Instead, I am going to do three outrageous things. I hope, however, that they will tie into this Trinity Sunday.

Outrageous thing #1: I invite all men to stand. Look around. What do you notice? (Laughter. "Grey hair."). I ask a woman: "why did you not stand?" She says, "because I'm not a man." But haven't we been told over and over again that words like "man", "men", "mankind" include all of us? When some of us have wanted to use words and images that better represent the fullness of humanity, haven't we been told that it's unnecessary or silly because "men" includes us all? I guess that isn't true! And, you know, it never has been true - not in churches where the "men" who were permitted to be leaders were quite male according to their constitutions. Not in the constitution of the United States of America which never intended that women - or even men of color - be part of all men created equal. Not, I would submit, in our Scripture. And, certainly not at a practical level, as we have just seen.

Now I know that some dismiss this as PC (political correctness), but it's more than that. It's about justice. The Episcopal Church, in its '79 *Book of Common Prayer* and '82 *Hymnal*, made a start with language about humanity. But this was the 70s. Concern about inclusive language was just starting. Now, the academy and the business world have outpaced the church, and it is a bit of a shock for those first coming into the church to hear the exclusively male words for humanity--let alone words for God!

The problem is not with using these words and images. The problem is using *only* these words and images. Words and images are not neutral--they matter--they are not just means of expression, they affect how we think about things. They reflect what things mean to us, what value we place on them. If, from the time I'm just a little girl, I hear only this from these best loved hymns do I not at some deep level come to believe that I am less created in God's image than my brothers?

Language is formative, and that certainly includes the words we use in worship. There is a well known Latin phrase: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. That is loosely translated as "how we pray/worship forms how we believe." If that is true, then this is a big deal! The problem is limiting God when we should expand to the full extent of our imagination and language, for even our most creative words will be insufficient in naming a God who is beyond our human understanding.

There is a series of Episcopal liturgical books called *Enriching Our Worship*. These are supplements that might become the basis for the next BCP. They have moved into what is called "expansive language" for God--not eliminating Father language but expanding it with the wonderful images contained right within our Bible--God as Creator, tree of life, holy fire, mother eagle; metaphors of giving birth; Jesus as a hen gathering chicks under her wings; God as weaver and baker.

There are alternate ways of naming the Trinity, too. There is the traditional baptismal formula, the immanent Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And there is what is called the economic Trinity that expresses the functional aspects--Creator, Redeemer, and Giver of Life.

Once again, the problem is when we forget that all human language about God is metaphor and come to think of it as reality. It's not about our words and images in Scripture and liturgy per se but how those words and images which may have reflected ancient understandings have become so deeply embedded in our own traditions as to be accepted as "normal." And how, maybe unconsciously, some of those attitudes are perpetuated and are revealed not only in a person's feeling excluded in the church but in broader discrimination, racism, and even the kind of hatred we see in what appears today to be a "war against women." Our attitudes and values are not just a product of our own times but are imbued with the weight of the centuries and embedded in the very foundations of our culture.

I invite you to listen carefully today as we use a Eucharistic prayer from *Enriching Our Worship* this season. This is not new. It has often been used here at Grace.

As humans, we are also touched by word pictures and images like icons and works of art. With that in mind, let's look at the reading from Proverbs that Janet read today:

The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth--when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil. When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him, like a master worker;

and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.

What other scripture does this remind you of? It reminds me of John 1:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.

The Proverbs reading is clearly from the Hebrew Scriptures, long before Christ. Jewish people came to identify Lady Wisdom in Proverbs (also Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach) with the Torah. But Christians appropriated this early on: there was conflict as far back as those early Councils: some thought lady Wisdom was Christ (John--Logos/the Word) others thought she was the Holy Spirit.

Outrageous thing #2: somewhere in this week's sermon preparation, I came across something that caused me to do what a professor called "chasing rabbits:" I left my reading to google a work of art, and then began to chase after details seemingly unrelated to theme. It was the famous fresco of Michelangelo on the ceiling of Sistine Chapel called "Creation of Adam." You know the one: the old, bearded God reaching out, finger tip within a microsecond of touching that of the human one. As I read articles about the image, I became intrigued and some thoughts began to form.

I'm interested in the right half of the image that I tried not very successfully to reproduce on bulletin.

In the Late 19th century, the well-known art historian, Leo Steinberg, was the first to try to identify the other figures surrounding God. He named Lucifer and his demonic buddy, the infant Christ, and the woman in God's embrace as Eve. Other art commentators argued that this woman was Mary, but there were many artistic arguments such as scale, certain artistic details, and nudity. The latter was not considered congruent with Mary, the mother of Christ!

And here is where my thinking went on my "rabbit chasing." If we accept Steinberg's claim of the presence of the infant Christ in the picture with God, it seems odd that the third person of the Trinity isn't present. But strangely, even with a google search, I couldn't find any reference to support my notion of the woman as Holy Wisdom (except one discounted letter to the editor from Steinberg)--until in the last 20 years (and even then, there were just a few).

So. Why do I, why should we care? Surely we, here at Grace do not discriminate against women. We have 3 female priests, for Heaven's sake. We have had women in leadership positions for a very long time. I'm preaching to the choir today!

We should care because as the Church being the body of Christ and witnessing to Christ in the world, Jesus should be our model. He lived in a patriarchal society, but

even within that, he was radical in how he included and valued women. We should do no less in our time and place.

I'm not suggesting that we throw out our BCP or favorite hymns or our Lord's Prayer and creed but continue to supplement with newer prayers like from EOW or the Anglican Church of Canada's book. Add some new hymns with expanded language for both humanity and God. Teach and pass down these multiple images to our children so that we can finally break this chain. And--maybe join me in the subversive language of the Ho Spirit as "she."

Outrageous thing #3: I'm not going to wrap this up in a tidy conclusion. I'm going to leave you to ponder (as I have been doing all week). Look carefully at the Michelangelo fresco--google a color copy--and ponder that woman. Take your BCP and look at the Eucharistic prayers along side the EOW version in the bulletin. Pray over it, and let the Holy Spirit do her work in you. And, if you want to talk after you get your cups of coffee and your snacks this morning, let's do it!

Amen.