

Trinity Year A 2011

“When they saw him (the raised Christ) they worshipped him, but some doubted.”

It's been a while since we've been to my mother's beach place, but Katharine and I just spent several days there. As my memory ages, that place has become the sacred place of my childhood and young adulthood...even more so than the home I grew up in....It is mostly screen porch that wraps around the front and one side of the house, upon which we spent most of our time when not out on the water or sleeping. At night when my father was alive he'd allow no lights on out on the screened porch, so we could see the lights of the fishing village of St. Andrews dancing across the dark water from the east, and all the goings on out in the bay....flounderer's, shrimpers, having learned their expert lore from generation to generation...the lights along the barges pushed skillfully through the night by tug boats bearing their hidden commerce....headed along the intra coastal waterway in the night towards some mysterious destination....the lights of the channel buoys blinking....everything rife with meaning...everything related....the soft breeze and all the noises of night alive.

We read stories or told stories almost every night after supper...Some of the more profound conversations with family and friends (and the occasional argument) took place on that porch....I was in my twenties I think when I asked my quasi-professional theologian mother, at least according to her... and indeed she has formidable spiritual insight.... my question was that if we say we come from a monotheistic tradition, the belief in a single God....then what's up with the Trinity, Father Son and Holy Spirit, that's three not one...(and by the way my homiletics professor warned us not to preach on the T...he said you'll frustrate your congregation and yourself).. her first answer, which I should have been able to predict, was well “that was something a bunch of men came up with in the fourth century”.... But she went on to say that it was an attempt to explain the multifaceted nature of God....God as creator....God as Savior and redeemer... and God the life force itself, Spirit that moves among us unseen like the wind....but that's still three, I said....yes, three in one, One God in three persons....It's a paradox she said with the wave of a hand....and added, men are good at paradoxes as she removed plates from the table.

We've over the years revisited this conversation, and now that I've been to seminary she's asking me the questions....I don't have the nerve to tell her that what I learned in seminary was how little I really know....the

good side of that being that the Christian life is not about learning a dogmatic set of beliefs, a laundry list of doctrine... but the life of faith is an exciting, sometimes exhilarating life of discovery, and a life of worship (we are told the disciples worshipped Jesus even amid their doubts....that's good news for me!)....yes, we have our creeds, we have our historical teachings... we have theology intrinsic to our Prayer Book...but still there is speculation, thank God....speculation, new knowledge informed by a great mystery, a great mystery that tells the truth...reveals the truth.... And affirms old truths we've learned over the ages...and this revelation happens to us in moments along the way we quite least expect....this journey headed to who knows where, this journey towards the great mystery, a mystery dawning as we speak.

Over the years I've come to think of the Trinity in this way....That Father, Son and Spirit....Creator, Savior and Life Sustainer are an image... an image of how it is that God is with us....remembering that we are made in the image of God....so therefore we are creative beings, like God is a creative being ...we are also then the image of Christ....people of conscience, world changers as Christ's body alive and active in our world ...and we are the image of the life giving Spirit...the very breath of God... So bearing the likeness of God, we are intimately implicated in this theological image of Trinity, we are of it, and it of us....the important characteristic being relationship, God is relationship; God is relatedness, collaborative relatedness...with one there is no relationship, with three there is.....God, the three in one with the people of faith a part implies that our God...the one who is three....is a God about relationship....a loving relationship of creativity and collaboration and imagination,....and with this image we recognize that all the world is intimately related and lives and moves by contingency, everything related... A relationship about bearing healing and bearing justice and compassion (the way Jesus lived)....and bearing the life giving Spirit that moves over the chaos of our world....all of these images of God and us as God's people related to each other in myriad and infinite ways....We say Holy Trinity... but we could say holy relatedness....because loving relationships go someplace.

The passage today in Matthew's Gospel uses the words Father, Son and Holy Spirit by which the faithful were Baptized, but there is no teaching per se in scripture about a theology of Trinity...remember that came about by a bunch of men later on....although I would say that our baptisms indeed initiate us into the relationship of Trinity.....But what this passage is about first and foremost is Matthew in the context of Jesus' last resurrection

appearance to his disciples saying something as to the character of the church, and giving the church its marching orders.

So let's look at the passage: Jesus summons them, the disciples, to the mountain in Galilee, (mountain means a God encounter)... We are told that there are only eleven now, not twelve... so the original fellowship is now broken... We are told they see the risen Jesus and worship him, and still some doubt... Doubt?! These are the first chosen to follow, eye witnesses, and some doubt? (and as Paul Tillich would say centuries later, that doubt is essential to faith, because it leads to discovery) So, two characteristics of the church: brokenness and doubt (then and now)... then the eleven are told to go initiate new learners... remember the word disciple means learner... to invite others into the fellowship, this relationship with God, and teach them the ways of Jesus... the way of relatedness.

It is for us, brothers and sisters, the people of the very Godhead, made in God's image, broken and doubting, to go into our world bearing the creative, redemptive life force so that the wounds of the world are made whole; and I'm convinced that in that manner of life, living as Jesus lived, selflessly... there is healing and wholeness for us as well... ask people who go on mission trips... ask people who serve the least among us... those whose life's work is for a just world... ask them if they themselves are not transformed by the experience... to live within the Trinity is not just to be in right relationship with God, Jesus, each other and our neighbor, but it is also being profoundly related to the created order itself... and the means by which we live this divine life, our great commission... is to live the way of Jesus, of learning, discovery and teaching... to live the way of healing, compassion, of mercy... you know the list that you hear Sunday after Sunday... the way of love in short, loving neighbor as we love ourselves... and the way of love can only exist in relationship. This way of love puts us in a God-relatedness which will bear us up as we bear the good to our world, it will bear us up as learners and teachers of the sacred lore... We work in thought, word and deed in this way of the Christ; and we worship, our doubts notwithstanding... Let us live this great commission Christ gives us... and together we'll make our way on this beautiful and mysterious journey that will require our skill and our courage and our imaginations... this journey in the light and in the dark, over the deep... paying attention to the signs... Marking the channel buoys along the way, this way about which we are learning much, and our trusting the mystery drawing us... and one fine day we will arrive at that great mystery that tells all truth, the word from the beginning, and we'll discover what we've known deep down all along... and we will be glad.