

June 12, 2022 Trinity Sunday

Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church

Psalm Eight

"Location, Location, Location"

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"Clowns to the left of me, jokers to the right, here I am stuck in the middle with you...Yes I am stuck in the middle with you." Does anyone remember this old diddy by Stealer's Wheel from the 1970's? Here is a revised version for us this morning. "God to the left of me, God to the right, here I am stuck in the middle with you, yes I am stuck in the middle with you."

One Sunday, many years ago, a retired engineer came up to me with a picture he had crafted of how he envisioned the Trinity. He had sketched out what looked like an atom. But instead of protons, neutrons and electrons circling each other, he had drawn in Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. What struck me most about the drawing was how much open space there was inside of it. It dawned on me that there was more than enough room for us to live our entire lives within the Godhead itself.

I have always been intrigued by the Jewish notion of tzimtzum. It states that when God decided to create the world the first step was the need to retreat, to allow for one small corner of existence that was not completely permeated by the divine essence. There needed to be room created for something else to literally have a place to exist. But perhaps it was not so much a retreat by the divine but an expansion, like a person filling their lungs with air, or a growing womb. Maybe the divine just expanded the space within Godself. The three

members of the Trinity all just took a half step back allowing room for us to be created, not beside or apart from God, but within Godself.

Psalm Eight with its opening and closing praise of God's sovereignty, "O Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" and its sandwich-filling of humanity's place in the order of things, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" suggests that we are indeed safely ensconced within the Godhead.

As the devastating war continues in Ukraine and acts of violence continue across our own nation we are reminded of how much death and destruction there is to be found in our world. Sweet Jesus, we tear each other up. The world can be a very dangerous place. So what difference does it make where we live our lives; where we sweat and bleed, laugh and cry; where we help each other and harm each other? It is all the same, right? We are still loving and hurting, living and dying regardless of the address on some metaphysical map?

Except, except when it happens within God, it happens to God as well. What we build up, is built up inside of God. What we tear down, is torn down inside of God. It is impossible for anything to occur outside of God. The trinity allows us to be in the very center of all things. We are not on one end of the universe with God on the other, stretching to try and meet somewhere in the middle. We need not be ever fearful that we could possibly be too far away from the divine for God to care or know or understand our predicament. In reality, we are perpetually surrounded by the divine.

Yet, we often do not recognize where we are situated. We can be like a three-year-old in the midst of a meltdown who is

wrapped in her mother's arms and yet is strangely momentarily unaware of how deeply well-loved and protected they are. But in the end that embrace works its way through our layers of fear and anxiety, self-involvement and sinfulness, and makes itself known. We are reminded that no matter what we do to each other and to ourselves, no matter how much very real pain and heartache we create or experience, we are never actually beyond the bounds of God.

So what do we do when we recognize exactly where we are situated? How do we respond to discovering that our entire lives are occurring within God's very self? One commentator describes the worshipful tone of Psalm Eight as a "tidal pull of praise...(an) artesian inevitability as a human response to God, a response that can be dammed up only at huge expense to the soul." (Mctyre, p. 33) When we recognize we are in the midst of God we have a powerful natural need to offer praise. We have all tasted it. The moment when your breath is taken away; a sunset at your favorite place in the world with your favorite person in the world; when the choir is channeling Bach himself during the anthem; a precious moment when it is crystal clear you are in the place you are supposed to be, doing what you were always meant to do. And sometimes praise bubbles up and out of us in moments that are far from perfect.

Psalm Eight speaks to the need to praise. It is placed after a series of pleas for deliverance in the psalter. There is no sense that this word of extraordinary praise is born in the midst of a perfect world. Sometimes in the middle of a terrible day a glimpse of the gorgeous greenery of our area or a phone call from a friend will fill us with gratitude, even and especially in the midst of our imperfect lives. The context for

praise can be almost anything, but the feeling is the same. Exhilarating. Joyful. Heck, almost levitating. The moments when "thank you Jesus" slips from our lips without irony or the aid of liturgy are intoxicating.

But what is the purpose of this praise? Is it to prop up the ego of an insecure deity? "Hey God, just want to let you know you are doing a great job, yeah a really great job." Let's hope not. Let's hope our Creator does not need a pep talk. It may be a rather reductive description for that moment when our breath is taken away, but praise is a tool of location recognition. Pure praise leads us beyond the sunset, or the melody, or the glowing recognition of all we have been given and lets us respond from a visceral place deep within us to the reality that God does indeed exist and surrounds us. And in responding to that reality with praise we own the truth on a different level.

The world often creates the illusion that there is no God, there is no one responsible for the creation that surrounds us, no one in charge of the destiny of all things. Praise silences such sleight of hand in ways that a thousand well-reasoned theological arguments never could.

Years ago I remember going to celebrate communion with several homebound members all on the same day. I was particularly struck by two of the women I visited, both of whom were over 95 years old. They both had significant health issues. They both had their share of challenges and tragedies over the years. But the common bond that struck me most powerfully was their ability to praise God for all they had received. They were grateful for the people who loved and cared for them; grateful for their Church; grateful for all God had

done for them throughout their lives. They could have been bitter. They could have been sour. It would not have been hard to come up with a list of reasons for them to be frustrated and disappointed with their lives, but they were not. These women prayed with delight and enthusiasm and gratitude. They, like the psalmist, recognized that their entire lives had been lived within the bounds of God's gracious loving Trinity and it filled them with a deep and abiding joy. It is a joy that challenges the power of suffering to conquer us. They possessed a praise that strongly protests against any idea that the painful realities of this life can deny the reality of God and God's love for us.

On this Trinity Sunday we are asked to ponder what significance the Trinity has for us. Why does it matter? Does this odd theological concept of three in one really have anything concrete to offer us? It does. It lets us recognize that we live our entire lives surrounded by our God, Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. As they say in real estate, "location, location, location."

From the place where we live, nestled so perfectly among these three persons of the Godhead, it is clear that being abandoned or beyond God's reach is patently absurd. No matter our frailty or our foibles, or whatever may befall us, we are cradled within our God. And recognizing the reality of our location will fill us with joyful praise.

So, I close doing just that.

"O LORD, our Sovereign,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

Out of the mouths of babes and infants
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens,

the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars

that you have established;
what are human beings

that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honour.

You have given them dominion

over the works of your hands;

you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen,

and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Sovereign,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

God to the left of me, God to the right, here I am stuck in
the middle with you.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

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