

Prayer for Illumination

Gracious God, illumine these words by your Spirit that we might hear what you would have us hear and be who you would have us be, for the sake of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. Amen.

Romans 5:1-5

5 Therefore, since we have been made righteous through his faithfulness, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² We have access by faith into this grace in which we stand through him, and we boast in the hope of God's glory. ³ But not only that! We even take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, ⁴ endurance produces character, and character produces hope. ⁵ This hope doesn't put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Trinity

We've circled the church calendar back to Trinity Sunday! If you were here last year, you may remember receiving a Holy Mystery Card. This card was to get out of conversations about and stress over the relationship between the triune God. We believe that God is one in three and three in one. Yep, I agree, clear as mud. Right?

I may have told y'all this story before, but when I was in my second or third year of seminary, I was in my theology class and we were working on the doctrine of the Trinity. I was (and still do) have a hard time understanding what all of this meant, how the trinity could be one thing, but also come from one thing, and also be three things, but also not come *from* any of them? It was a whole time... well, I happened to have a call with my aunts right around then. I was expressing my frustration and confusion in my classes about this whole "trinity" thing. An important piece of this to know is that my aunts are Unitarian Universalists. This means they very specifically don't believe in a triune God. Unitarian vs. Trinitarian... One of my aunts went to grad school for Christian Education and graduated, not believing in a triune God. So, as I am venting to them, Aunt Lisa says, "yeah... that's about as far as I got too!" and I had to cut our conversation short.. I was wayyyy too far into seminary and being a pastor to start questioning the fundamental understanding of God being three persons. This is the entire reason the Holy Mystery Card exists. It is none of my business *how* God exists as three persons in one being. I just know that they do. That's enough for me. If you need a Holy Mystery Card for this year, please see me after worship, and I will grab one for you!

The important thing about understanding our Triune God is that, in the most straightforward and easily understandable way, God exists in a relational way. God isn't some far-off man sitting on a cloud, looking down or pulling all the puppet strings of our lives. That just isn't our God. And that's a good thing! That kind of God isn't for me; I love our relational God. I think it's a beautiful thing that as soon as I was confused and needed to process, I reached

out to people. I needed to work through my confusion *in relationships* with people. That is God at work! Every time you attend worship, meet up with a friend for lunch, call someone you're thinking about, or commit to a relationship with another being, you're living into the relational nature of our God.

Now, you may be a little confused about the beginning of this relationship... *when* did the trinity start? Good question! May I direct our attention to the first testament passage this morning? This is **Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31**

8 Doesn't Wisdom cry out
and Understanding shout?

² Atop the heights along the path,
at the crossroads she takes her stand.

³ By the gate before the city,
at the entrances she shouts:

⁴ I cry out to you, people;
my voice goes out to all of humanity.

²² The LORD created me at the beginning of his way,
before his deeds long in the past.

²³ I was formed in ancient times,
at the beginning, before the earth was.

²⁴ When there were no watery depths, I was brought forth,
when there were no springs flowing with water.

²⁵ Before the mountains were settled,
before the hills, I was brought forth;

²⁶ before God made the earth and the fields
or the first of the dry land.

²⁷ I was there when he established the heavens,
when he marked out the horizon on the deep sea,

²⁸ when he thickened the clouds above,
when he secured the fountains of the deep,

²⁹ when he set a limit for the sea,
so the water couldn't go beyond his command,
when he marked out the earth's foundations.

³⁰ I was beside him as a master of crafts.
I was having fun,
smiling before him all the time,

³¹ frolicking with his inhabited earth
and delighting in the human race.

((This is the word of God, for the people of God. Thanks be to God))

Did you catch what Wisdom says in this passage? Verses 22-23 say, “²² The LORD created me at the beginning of God’s way, before God’s deeds long in the past. ²³ I was formed in ancient times, at the beginning, before the earth was.” Wisdom has historically been seen as the Spirit of God, with a different name. But the understanding is that the Holy Spirit brings us wisdom and guidance when we seek it through our day-to-day lives. Well, if we know that we have the Creator and Spirit at the beginning... we’re still missing a person of the Trinity... John 1 1-3 says, “**1** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. **2** The Word was with God in the beginning. **3** Everything came into being through the Word, and without the Word nothing came into being.” Then, as John is explaining who he is and who Christ is, he says this in verse 14, “**14** The Word became flesh and made his home among us. We have seen his glory, glory like that of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”

Creator was obviously at the beginning, creating. Spirit was present in wisdom, playing and co-creating with the Creator. And finally, the Word was in the beginning, the Word was *with* God, and the Word *was* God. Then, the Word became Flesh, who we know as Jesus Christ. This trinity, the three in One and One in Three, has been present the whole time. The relationships between the persons of our Triune God are intentional and meant to mimic our own relationships while also calling for our relationship with God.

The other big question that comes up when we think about God, and our relationship with God is “Why is there suffering?” If we are meant to have this close relationship with God and understand them to be a close and loving being, why does our existence include such suffering? John Wurster, who is a pastor in Houston, Texas, says, “Instead of piling on the theoretical, esoteric descriptions of the Trinity, let us simply affirm what counts about this doctrine: In Jesus, suffering has been taken into God’s very being. For in Jesus, God was on the cross, aching, bleeding, crying out in pain. When we say God is there in our suffering, it’s not a hollow phrase. God is there, and God has been there, truly. The story of Jesus’ death and his resurrection is the story of God bringing forth new life out of suffering. In that we can rejoice!” He’s correct! The important piece of the trinity is that God suffered with and for humanity through Jesus Christ. It wasn’t just a show, it wasn’t just God feeling like being terrible that day... Jesus was suffering as any human would. God knows human pain and suffering and suffers with us. The passage that Eva read this morning from Romans says, “We even take pride in our problems, because we know that trouble produces endurance, ⁴ endurance produces character, and character produces hope. ⁵ This hope doesn’t put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” This is Paul speaking to the church in Rome. While we may be in a bit of a different situation now, we still have problems. We still know that trouble can produce endurance, endurance adds character, and character produces hope. This is a very “what doesn’t kill you, makes you stronger” vibe. And while I hate to disagree with Paul... it can cause a lot of difficulty, trauma, and stress, to enforce any of those “steps” to having Hope.

I prefer to believe that God doesn’t test us. God isn’t waiting for us to reach our limit just so they can sit far away and say “HA! I knew it! You’re weak!” That isn’t the God of love,

relationship, and grace that we understand God to be. God suffered with and for humanity in the person of Jesus. The Creator and Spirit were present and suffering too, through those relationships with Jesus and with humanity.

“Rub some dirt in it” is definitely one way to learn and grow as people. I believe God calls us to love and grace more frequently. God calls us to have hope that comes only from God. As Paul says, “this hope doesn’t put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” Because of God’s relationships with humanity, we know that God loves us. We know that we serve a graceful God, and *that* brings us hope. The trinity, and our relationship with God and other people, brings the hope we feel because of the relationships. Even in suffering, and trust me, I know suffering is real. It can feel like the biggest thing while you’re going through it. It can feel dark and dreary; it can feel like you’ve *become* the darkness when you’re in the midst of suffering. And still, we know that God is present with us in those moments as well. We know that God holds onto us and walks with us even when we feel alone. We know, because God is a relationship. God is a being that exists in 3 persons without our having to understand. We don’t have to understand because God already knows. God already loves us. God already gives us grace and peace.

Please pray with me.