

*God is More (& So Are You!)*

by Rev. Dr. Durrell Watkins

Sunshine Cathedral, Trinity Sunday 2009 (Rom.8.14-16; Matt. 28.16-20)

I once asked my great-aunt Gladys if there was anything God couldn't do. She said, "Actually there is one thing God can't do...Please everyone." Later I would read a quote by Bill Cosby that says, "I don't know the key to success, but the key to failure is trying to please everybody."

On close examination, our scripture readings today actually have something to do with people feeling satisfied, and how that can happen. It can't happen by expecting others to make us happy. In fact, the more we place our happiness in the hands of other people, the more we wind up disappointed. Then we tend to blame them for not agreeing that we should be in charge of the universe, when in fact we simply forgot that we are responsible for our own happiness. It's no one else's job to make us happy, and anyway, they can't.

Let's begin with the passage from Romans today. Slavery was part of the Roman economy. Paul knew personally people who had been enslaved. And he contrasts the experience of slavery to the experience of freedom that one has with healthy, life-giving spirituality. "You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry [out to God] it is the spirit of [belonging] bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

To be slave is to be dehumanized, but to an adopted child means that you were chosen...an adopted child isn't in the family by accident of birth, but was chosen by one who wanted to be her parent.

So imagine the empowering image Paul is trying to offer his readers. In the world where greed, injustice, and violence can cause so much pain, one can turn within and discover the very spark of divinity, or Spirit. That spirit isn't like the systems of the world where slavery, war, poverty and injustice can dominate. That indwelling spirit is the mark of belonging to the Source of all life. The spirit of All-Life is part of us, within us, and longs to express as us. The spirit of belonging, of empowerment, not of despair...that is the spirit is ours to experience and express.

When we operate from our fears, our ego-selves, our sense of littleness or separation, we deny the reality of this presence in and as us; but when we operate from an awareness of this divine spark within, or as Paul put it, when are led by the Spirit, then we recognize our sacred value (and the sacred value of others).

We aren't outcasts in God's view; we are the children of God...we belong, we are loved and those moments when we allow ourselves to truly believe that are the moments when we are the most noble, the most generous, the most gracious, the most able to act with integrity.

You see, if we need outside circumstances to go our way in order for us to be happy, we might never be happy. In Paul's world where people are being imprisoned, executed, enslaved, their land occupied...if they are looking outside themselves for happiness where will they ever find it?! But there is within them a spirit that offers optimism and joy regardless of circumstances.

Of course, we do what we can to confront injustice, to ease suffering, and to promote peace and fairness in our world. In fact, that's what ministry is! But we need not wait for the outer world to conform to our desires before we experience peace, hope, and joy. Those feelings are a matter of attitude, and attitude is a choice. We can't control the world around us and we can't make people play by our rules, but we can choose to have hope and happiness no matter what. That's the power of the Spirit.

When Paul says "We aren't given a spirit of slavery but one of belonging" he means we can choose our attitudes; in fact, we are the only ones who can choose our attitudes. God doesn't want us to feel like life's victims; God wants us to have hope and joy, and God has given us the power to choose the more joyous path, the spirit of belonging.

The message we read in Matthew's gospel today is very similar, isn't it? "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the [Creator] and of the [Chosen One] and of the holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe everything that I have taught you. And remember, I am with you always..." (Matthew 28)

Now I don't want to get into all the debates about the Trinity. Those who claim that the Trinity is not outlined in scripture are technically correct. We have this Trinitarian baptismal formula at the end of Matthew. We have Paul's benediction in his 2nd Letter to the Corinthians: "May the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the holy Spirit be with you always." And that's pretty much it for scriptural references, and none of them define the Trinity or even suggest that the Sovereign, Savior, and Sanctifier are actually united in any sort of mystical unity.

However, since the Fourth century, the Trinity has been one of the divine images in Christian theology. Since then, the Trinity has appeared in Christian art, music, and liturgy; and of course, in the Christian imagination and experience.

Some pre-Christian traditions also offer triune images of the divine. And in our human experience, we find ourselves being a unity of mind, body, spirit, just as we experience the sun in multiple ways.

There is the mass of the sun (too hot, too large, and too far away for us to experience directly, but we can know about it intellectually). There is the light of the sun (which we can see) and the warmth of the sun (which we can feel). There is one sun, but we experience it in a trinity of ways...in our thinking, in our seeing, and in our feeling. Likewise, there is the divine Reality which we ponder but can never fully understand; the light of God which we see in Jesus and other enlightened teachers, and the warmth of God's loving presence which we feel in moments of prayer and contemplation...We call

these experiences Creator, Christ, and Comforter...One reality, but too big to be contained in a single image.

So even though Trinitarian theology isn't spelled out for us in scripture, if we find it useful, it is certainly one of many images that are available for our use.

God is love. Love affirms (redeems) us. The experience of loving and being loved is life-giving, like the very breath of life, or spirit. The Lover, the beloved, and the love itself...the Knower, the Doer, and the Action...the Infinite Mind, the perfect Idea, and the Expression of It...The Author, the Word, and the Interpretation...The Creative, Redeeming, Sustaining Principle...Trinitarian imagery lends itself to endless possible understandings, and that may be exactly the point.

There are many names and images for the divine in scripture, and none of them are meant to be carved in stone; in fact the diversity of images is so we won't let any one of them become an idol. Whenever we find a name or experience of God, that isn't the end of the story; God is always more!

We see God in scripture as a Mother, Father, Rainbow, Whirlwind, Fortress, Light, Cloud, Flame, Eagle, Dove...No ONE image is big enough! God is encountered in storms, on mountains, in water, in the words of the prophets, and of course in Jesus. No one image is enough to limit, contain, or understand the divine. Whatever your understanding of God, it isn't big enough! Whatever you believe about God, the truth is, God is more.

Trinitarian imagery is a way of saying, God is more. God is like the Love which creates all that is Good...and God is more. God is like a friend who affirms our sacred value...and God is more. God is like the experience of empowerment...and God is more. God is Creator, but not just Creator. God is also Redeemer, but not just redeemer. God is sustaining spirit. And even that doesn't exhaust the ways God can be experienced. The Trinity isn't an argument that limits God; the Trinity is a challenge for us to let God be more.

And here's where it gets really exciting: WE are made in God's image. If God is More, then we are more. God is more than we have imagined, and WE are more than we have imagined.

For those who need encouragement, for those who need to feel loved, for those who need to have their hope renewed or who have never heard that they are a beautiful part of God's glorious creation, Jesus' commission to us is a mission of mercy: Go everywhere and immerse all people in the message that God is more than they have imagined, and so are we.

This is the good news. Amen.

**Divine Life expresses as me.  
Divine Love expresses as me.  
Divine Light expresses as me.  
I allow God to be more in my life.  
And I am truly blessed.  
Amen.**

“If God is wholeness, peace, and joy, then the divine Will for all is wholeness, peace, and joy. The will of God is always toward the more abundant life.” Dr. Ernest Holmes