

Message for Trinity Sunday – May 30, 2021

Proverbs 8:1-11

I hadn't thought of them for years until I read this morning's scripture passage, and what am I talking about are the tinkers who came knocking at the door during my childhood. The tinkers were traveling sales people but unlike the other salesmen they didn't just sell one product such as vacuum cleaners, rather they sold a little bit of everything! If the housewife (and during the daytime back then it was invariably a housewife who answered the door) showed any interest at all then the big suitcase would be opened in a flash. You never knew what the contents might be and that was part of the tinker's attraction. There would be such as kitchen gadgets, cutlery, sewing accessories, dish cloths and sometimes, to a child's delight, even toys as well. If it was small, cheap, and easily carried then the tinkers sold it, and looking back, I think that they were a traveling version of today's dollar stores. And the tinkers were very good salespeople too. They would do their best to convince the potential customer that they simply had to buy what they were selling, but they were never pushy or obnoxious about it. They could and would take no for an answer, their rationale being "why get a potential customer mad? Even if they aren't buying anything today, maybe they'll buy something the next time I come knocking at the door!" As I said a moment ago, I hadn't thought of these people for years but when I read today's scripture passage, it struck me; without being the least bit irreverent about it, God is a bit like a tinker.

Today's scripture passage says that one of the things that God really wants us to have is wisdom. Oddly enough though wisdom is portrayed as a salesperson and the ancient equivalent of a tinker. Instead of knocking at people's doors though, wisdom is portrayed as a woman standing on the hilltops, at the crossroads and at the city gates selling her wares. "Come and look at what I've got for sale! Have I ever got a deal for you! Do you want to be happy? Do you want to be content? Then come on over and buy some wisdom!" And what is wisdom? As the Bible understands it, wisdom is a fear of God, though we should really translate it, a respect for God and his ways. And wisdom is the way to truly experience peace, joy, happiness, and contentment in life too. Contrary to what people sometimes think, these qualities are not to be found in riches and possessions, rather they are to be found in having the right relationship with both

God and the people around us. As Jesus said when asked what religion, and by implication what life itself are all about:

“You shall love the lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And you shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

This is wisdom and this is the key to experiencing the true happiness and contentment that we all long for in life. Indeed this may be one of the great lessons that we can learn from the present pandemic. In a world of physical distancing, “bubbles”, and no social gatherings, many people feel so isolated and now have a deeper appreciation of their relationships with other people. A reflection of this are the commercials that urge us to follow the rules and to get vaccinated as soon as possible, all so that we can eventually hug one another again. Having the right relationship with both himself and with others is what God wants to sell us, but this of course isn't how we usually think of God is it? We don't usually think of God as being like a salesperson urging us to buy what he has to offer. In fact this image of God almost seems to be irreverent and disrespectful. One writer puts it this way.

“Last year we visited Jerusalem. We entered the Holy City our first morning through the beautiful Damascus Gate. What a thrill entering this place of such spiritual grandeur!

Yet the grandeur of the moment was spoiled because of the incessant hawking of the street vendors who surrounded the entrance to the city gate.

Seeing that we were Americans, they began shouting out, ‘Hey mister! I’ve got great cigarettes here! Want a nice scarf? Look at what I’ve got here. Nice price. Not much money!’

The book of Proverbs say that ‘wisdom’ is just like those annoying street vendors. Lady Wisdom sits at the gates of the city shouting, hawking her wares, screaming out to everyone to come get some wisdom from her.

It's not a very uplifting image of Wisdom.”

Truly this may not be the most uplifting image of God either and it may almost seem beneath him. Even so it is an accurate one that perhaps we need to be reminded of from time to time.

Today is Trinity Sunday and this is the one Sunday of the year when we think about the nature of God, and more specifically, about the holy, mysterious wonder that is God: one god and yet still three persons; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Today's emphasis is usually, as the theologians like to say, on God's 'otherness'. We can think of the words of the hymn "Holy, holy, holy" which we would have sung if we had been able to worship together this morning.

"Holy, holy, holy, all the saints adore Thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea,
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
Who wert, and art and evermore shalt be."

and

"Holy, holy, holy, though the darkness hide Thee,
Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see,
Only Thou art holy; there is none beside Thee,
Perfect in power, in love and purity."

This hymn captures some of the power, majesty and mystery that is God and yet ... To return to today's scripture passage, God is also the one who, so-to-speak, stands at the city gate or comes knocking at the door of our lives, offering us what we truly need in life. If we don't think so, then all we have to do is remember some of the stories that Jesus told when trying to illustrate the nature of God.

There is for example the parable about the shepherd who had a flock of one hundred sheep. When one of them went missing he didn't say, "Oh well, at least I still have ninety-nine". No, instead he went out looking for the lost one and knew no peace until he had found it. And then there is one of Jesus' most famous stories of all, the Parable of the Prodigal Son. According to this story, a father had two sons, the youngest of which left home and made a total mess of his life. When that son finally mustered the courage to return home, his father rushed out to greet him and then gave him a welcome home party. Later when the older, stay-at-home son was full of anger and resentment and refused to join the celebrations, the father went out to him too.

What we have in these stories is not the holy mysterious God of the Trinity; rather we have the image of a god who loves us, comes after us and who wants

us to 'buy in' to what he is offering. The choice however is left up to us. God does not force himself upon us; he will not because, as St. John wrote, "God is love", and love by its very nature does not force or compel. Love means respecting the other person's freedom to choose, even if disagreeing or disapproving of the choices made. Indeed the nature of love, and even God himself, is captured well in one of the greatest religious paintings of all time.

Years ago while touring the United Kingdom, Susan and I visited St. Paul's cathedral in London. The cathedral is incredibly beautiful but as great as the building is, one of its main attractions is the painting, "The Light of the World" by Holman Hunt. This well-known painting is the inspiration for countless stained-glass windows including one at Omagh. The painting depicts Jesus wearing a crown which indicates that he truly is God. He is standing in the gloom holding a lantern and this reminds us that he is the "Light of the World". Jesus is also knocking at an ivy-covered door that has obviously not been opened for quite some time. What is most noteworthy about the door however is that it doesn't have a handle; it can only be opened from the inside. Truly this painting is, as one person has said, a "sermon in a frame". Jesus comes knocking at the door of our lives wanting us to let him in so that he might share with us what he has to offer. However, he doesn't force himself upon us. It is up to us whether we open the door or keep it shut, whether or not we will 'buy in' to what he is offering us.

Today is Trinity Sunday and today is the day when we remember the holy mystery that is God. God however is also like the woman who stood at the city gate selling her wares. Do you want to be happy? Come and buy what I have to offer! Indeed this is the true holy mystery that is God. God is the one who, while far removed from us, is at the same time the one who comes after us. Why? Because, as St. John said, "God is Love".

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty God, on this Sunday after Pentecost, this Trinity Sunday, we remember the holy mysterious wonder that is you; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We remember that you are God; that you and your ways are so far removed from us. And yet, at the same time we remember that you are also so close to each

and every one of us; that you come knocking on the doors of our lives hoping that we will let you in.

You who are the Way, the Truth, and the Life, help us we pray to be open to your presence in our lives. Help us to accept what you so freely offer, for our sakes and the sake of the people around us.

With the lower case counts and increasing number of people being vaccinated, we see light at the end of the tunnel. We thank you for the hope of a return to a more normal lifestyle. We pray too that we may learn from this horrible experience, that we may cherish the relationships, the activities and all the rest that all too often perhaps we took for granted.

We pray for all in authority as they strive to make the best decisions possible.

We pray for all on the front lines, those who are ill, and those who mourn.

We pray for your church, your Son's body here on earth, as she strives to minister in these challenging times.

With the discovery of the remains of the 215 bodies of the indigenous children at the former residential school in Kamloops, we pray for the sake of all those devastated by this unspeakable tragedy. Grant healing to the survivors and grant that we may confront the truth of what happened so that such things may never happen again. Help us we pray to build a society that reflects the values of your kingdom, both here on earth and in heaven.

We ask these things in your Son's name.

Amen