

TRINITY SUNDAY

Almighty and everlasting God, you have given to us your servants grace, by the confession of a true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of your divine Majesty to worship the Unity: Keep us steadfast in this faith and worship, and bring us at last to see you in your one and eternal glory, O Father; who with the Son and the Holy Spirit live and reign, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

- Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31
- Romans 5:1-5
- John 16:12-15
- Psalm 8
- or Canticle 13 (or Canticle 2)

Give ear O heavens, and I will speak;
let the earth hear the words of my mouth,
for I will proclaim the Name of the Lord,
and ascribe greatness to our God.

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth

What a difference a week makes. Last week the Spirit blew through here on Pentecost as we celebrated the birth of the Church, the ministry of Fr. Paul and Karisse, the Aztec Dancers and all of that. You could really feel the Spirit at work.

Spirit. Ruach. Pneuma. Wind. Breath.

Jesus says, “When the Spirit of truth comes, she will guide you into all truth.”

I say “she” because in Hebrew and Aramaic, spirit is a feminine noun. In the Greek it doesn’t have a gender, but that’s OK.

I think wind is a wonderful way to describe God. Don't you?

I like to go out and water our yard by hand whenever it's looking a little dry. We don't have a sprinkler system, so we have to do it by hand. We've got those expandable hoses that aren't supposed to kink (but they do), and I like to stretch the hose out to the farthest point of the flower beds and water each plant one by one. I don't want to set out a sprinkler and water the whole flower bed, because I don't want to water the weeds that keep springing up. So I water the plants I want to live and thrive, and I try to make sure all the weeds die of thirst.

Hey, I'm cruel. What can I say?

But do you know what? I keep the nozzle on spray because I don't want the jet spray to blast away the dirt around the base of the plants. So I use the shower setting. Unfortunately, the wind (and it seems like things are much windier these days than I remember from years past) – “the wind blows where it wills” as Jesus says, and the water blows off course so that even the part of creation I don't care for gets some of my water.

And that's OK. That's how the Spirit operates. Too often we try to control God, control life, control the Spirit. Like Jesus told Nicodemus earlier in John's Gospel, “The wind blows where it will. You don't know where it's coming from; you don't know where it's going to” – but “going” is what she does. The wind and the Spirit don't stand still. The wind and the Spirit don't sit still.

Sometimes She's a calm, cool breeze. Sometimes She's a blustery old windbag. The one thing She's not, though, is controllable!

That's the thing about the Spirit. That's the thing about the truth. They're both messy. They're both uncontrollable. And they're both propelling us where God wants us to go. **That's the Good News.**

Jesus says the Spirit will guide us into all truth ...

Just what **is** that TRUTH Jesus expects the Spirit to guide us into?

Well, it may seem counter-intuitive, but we've got to start off with what Jesus said. "I still have many things to say to you, but you can't bear them now."

It's like what the colonel says on the witness stand in the movie A FEW GOOD MEN: "You want the truth? You can't handle the truth!" He's just quoting Jesus!

The truth is like a toddler who doesn't want to go anywhere or doesn't want to do anything. You try to pick them up – to "bear" them – and they twist and turn; they go limp. They basically have to die before you can finally pick them up and carry them away.

The truth is, says Jesus, is that we are like toddlers, and it isn't until we collapse and die that Momma Spirit can pick us up and get us going where she wants us to go.

I don't like the term "losers," but that's basically what we have to be, or to recognize, is that we are losers, babies, toddlers, and that's OK.

It's not an insult. Jesus says, "When you can accept the truth, and die to self, you'll finally be in a condition I can do something with you."

"I don't want to die!" – "But you've got to."

Let me give you a couple of quick examples. John the Baptizer was a loser. He was a powerful prophet, a lot like Elijah, a lot like Moses. But when Jesus came along, his numbers went down as people started to follow Jesus. "He must increase," he mumbled, "while I must decrease. That's just the way it is."

Then, as we know, he gets arrested by Herod because he dared to criticise that era's orange despot. You know the story: Herod threw himself a birthday bash (probably had a parade of chariots in the morning), and then an orgy in the evening. Eventually, John loses his head, and Jesus says, "There was no greater prophet than John, yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."¹

God can't really use us, it seems, until we're dead.

Then there is Nicodemus in John 3. Another loser. A teacher of Israel who comes to Jesus at night. Scared of being seen. Doesn't know what Jesus is all about. Jesus tells him, "You must be born from above, or you must be born again." There is word-play going on here in the Greek.

Nicodemus snarfs at the idea – an old man crawling back into their mother's womb. Either she's dead or she won't have me, he laughs.

¹ Matthew 11:11

“Ah, but it is God who gives birth,” says Jesus. Watch out! Daddy God becomes Mommy God. It seems God could be transgender here, but the point Jesus is making is we have to die before God can do their work. First-birth came from the womb; second-birth comes through the tomb. Through death we find new life.

We can’t bear the truth, says Jesus, but God can bear us when we just lie down and die like the spiritual toddlers we are.

Another example? How about the woman at the well in the fourth chapter of John’s Gospel? A Samaritan (loser); a woman (a loser among losers); a woman who has had five husbands (so she either has very loose morals, or she’s a really lousy cook) – so a loser times five (not to mention the man she’s living with isn’t her husband (probably needs to get her a cookbook before he offers to marry her)).

“You can’t drink from the well of the water of life until you find yourself dying of thirst,” says Jesus. Even when she shared the good news with the townsfolk, they said, “It’s not because of what you told us we believe, but because we have heard for ourselves and believe this one is the savior of the world.”²

One more example from the Gospel of John? How about the story of Lazarus we heard toward the end of Lent? Lazarus is sick. Mary and Martha beg Jesus to come quickly to help him get better. Jesus dawdles. Can you believe it? Jesus dawdles. After a few days he finally gets up and goes to Bethany to see what he can do, but it’s too late. Loser Lazarus has lost his life. He’s not just dead; he’s dead and buried.

² John 4:41

Mary and Martha are livid. I don't blame them. They're losers. They've lost their beloved brother, which means their own lives may be somewhat tenuous, maybe somewhat at risk, too. Jesus asks them if they believe in the resurrection, which seems a bit cruel.

Resurrection is one of those theological matters that's fine to talk about in theory – oh yeah, someday God will raise us up, yada yada yada. Anyway, Lord, if you'd have been here we wouldn't need to be having this conversation, you git!"

"You want life? You've got to die with me," says Jesus.

Dead. Not a metaphor. Not asleep. Dead. Dead as a doornail. Dead, like Lazarus who was 4 days dead in the grave dead – so dead Martha and Mary could smell him from the street.

"But I want you to see what God can do," says Jesus. So Jesus cried out with a loud voice: Lazarus, "deuro exo" (day-euro exo) – Come out!" Exo is the same root where we get exodus – the same word Jesus used when he turned his face toward Jerusalem from the Mount of Transfiguration and said, "It is time for my exodus."

So in the Gospel today, Jesus says, "This is tough stuff, and you may not think you can handle it. But Momma God – the Spirit – will guide you.

And really, this is where we are as we enter into these summer months and the six long months following Pentecost. The color is green, like grass. It represents growth. But green is also the color of new growth – of saplings that aren't quite ready for harvesting, and that's just fine.

It is a reminder the son of the carpenter will be working with us, whittling away on us, finding ways to use us as they build the kingdom here in 2025 and beyond.

We've entered into a transition time, and it's every bit a tiny death we experience, with Fr. Paul and Karisse moving on, with the diocese stumbling around trying to figure out what to do, or how to be helpful.

The temptation is to rush things. There will be steps and mis-steps; there will be communication glitches and mistakes made, and all of that is OK, because Jesus said, "I will not leave you. I will not abandon you. You can have your melt-downs when things get overwhelming, and that's OK, because I will be with you to the end of the age. I will provide a Comforter to walk beside you, to guide you, to remind you of the things I said and did. All you need to do is tell the world what you've heard, show the world what God has done, and then relax."

As Jesus said in John 8 after healing the man born blind (another loser, by the way) – "Jesus said to those who believed in him, 'if you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples' (there's that word "truth" again), 'and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.'"³

We are free to die so that we may live. That's the Gospel. That's the Spirit! In the name of God who created us, God who redeems us, and God who guides us in our journey. Amen

Delivered at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Trinity Sunday, June 15, 2025 (Father's Day)
The Rev. Keith Axberd, Ret.

³ John 8:31ff

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?
On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:
"To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all that live.
The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth--
when he had not yet made earth and fields,
or the world's first bits of soil.
When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race."

Psalm 8

Domine, Dominus noster

- 1 O LORD our Governor, *
how exalted is your Name in all the world!
- 2 Out of the mouths of infants and children *
your majesty is praised above the heavens.
- 3 You have set up a stronghold against your adversaries, *
to quell the enemy and the avenger.
- 4 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, *
the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,
- 5 What is man that you should be mindful of him? *
the son of man that you should seek him out?
- 6 You have made him but little lower than the angels; *
you adorn him with glory and honor;
- 7 You give him mastery over the works of your hands; *
you put all things under his feet:
- 8 All sheep and oxen, *
even the wild beasts of the field,
- 9 The birds of the air, the fish of the sea, *
and whatsoever walks in the paths of the sea.
- 10 O LORD our Governor, *
how exalted is your Name in all the world!

Romans 5:1-5

Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

John 16:12-15

Jesus said to the disciples, "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."