

What are we?

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

Revd Linda Anshell

Sunday 3rd June 2007, Trinity Sunday

Proverbs 8:1-4; Psalm 8; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

In the name of God, creator, redeemer and sanctifier...

As a deacon in this parish I don't actually do anything different from any of our great lay readers, except very occasionally a liturgical thing or two, mostly at Easter. And I guess as an almost retired and not specifically licensed deacon I have a freedom to go to other places and do other things... in fact perhaps that is what diaconal ministry is!

But as far as the parish is concerned, my main work is the web site and today I want to use that as a resource! I looked up the last three years of sermons on Trinity Sunday and found a richness there!

Last year Rebecca talked about the trinity as a dance, and taught us something about the Tango as well!

The year before Ian Marshall (Anglicare) was visiting. After telling us to get up and leave if a preacher made excuses for a Trinity Sunday sermon, he talked about God as mystery, God incarnate and God alive and *driving*.

In 2004, using the same readings as today, Rob took us to the Athanasian creed! But then (fortunately) to our experience of god in creation, in Jesus, and in breathing life and the fire of life into us. (?the fire of life? came from Chris's Pentecost sermon of the previous week.)

So, if only we all had photographic memories, as well as all having computers (which I know we don't) I could sit down!

The dance, the mystery, the life, are an indication of a lively and loving god. There is a Jewish mystical tradition which says that when god created the universe this act caused a shattering of the divine fabric. ... Divine sparks are trapped within all of creation... (*trillions of them?*) A Jewish commentator on the Trinity says why only three? and then goes on to work out twelve... *do deka???*

So much for numbers...

The Proverbs reading comes from a section on Sophia, on wisdom ... she who was with him in the beginning....

The Psalm is what I want to focus on. It is one of my favourites and bears some exacting study.

Romans, boasting in the hope of the glory of god and affirming the gift of the Holy Spirit

John, another part of the "farewell discourse" of Jesus to the disciples, here focussing on the Spirit of Truth.

The Psalm is a glorious hymn to a creator god: "O Lord, our Lord, How excellent is your name in all the earth!"

In verse four it talks of: the heavens, the moon and the stars... these are not gods, — they are "the work of your fingers"... it is a creation psalm.

Then in verse five a very twentieth-century question: "What are we?"

What is humanity (enosh) that you remember us?

What is the son of man (ben adam) that you visit him?

In proverbs we have: I was... rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race. (son of man... ben adam)

Both Proverbs and the second part of the psalm verse use the phrase "son of man". That phrase points to individuality, not human society.

It is often used in the gospels, sometimes it might mean simply "I". (Me, myself, I;)

What am I that you, God, *you*, visit *me*?

So we have the particular, but also, in the psalm, the general, the universal, Humanity.... What is humanity that you remember us?

We are each of us individuals with personalities. This *is* a source of delight! And, we are human beings, a species in a special relationship with the creation and with the creator.

Do you notice something missing? The last part of the psalm: "You have given dominion" uses the language of coronation. The making of kings, but this is not about any particular king, and definitely not about any particular nation, race or any other group. It is general and it is universal.

And if God delights in us, should we not delight in each other? And what do we do?

We build walls to hide in, to keep safe from "the other". We separate ourselves into our own group, our own class, our own religion. Casting out the unclean (the outcasts) will not make us clean. Walling in our homes, our towns or cities, or even our whole country, excising territory, will not keep us "safe".

What will it do?

Nelson Mandela says:

A man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred; he is locked behind the bars of prejudice and narrow mindedness. I am not truly free if I am taking away someone else's freedom, just as surely as I am not free when my freedom is taken from me. The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity.?

If you build a wall it stops you from going out as well as stopping others coming in.

Today is a day of action that the World Council of Churches has designated for International Church action for Palestine and Israel.

It marks the fortieth anniversary of the 1967 war.

Since then many Palestinians have lived under Israeli occupation. In Canberra walkers will start at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture at 1pm to walk via the High Court and the Library to the Israeli embassy.

Bishop George says:

Walking in the company of others has long been both a literal and metaphorical way of listening, learning, sharing a common burden, and owning a shared destiny. Christians the world over can do no other

than walk with their sisters and brothers who live and minister in the Holy Land. That we have been asked by them to walk together on this significant anniversary is both a privilege and a responsibility. We all long for peace. We all embrace the peace that Jesus promised, a peace which passes understanding. We know that such peace is unknowable without justice. We walk therefore for peace with justice. We walk with Palestinian Christians, but we also walk with Jew and Muslim, with Arab and Israeli, who embrace the same vision.

The Separation Wall will not bring security, the rockets from both sides will not bring freedom.

There are many places in the world where we do not delight in the people who are next door, who are in different groups, who seek to live in different ways. But the message of this morning is that it is in difference that the dancing comes. In difference there is delight and individuality.

The idea of trinity shatters any ideas of uniformity.

(and here, an idea somewhat out of left field, but...)

10,000 acres of blueberries in the USA are under threat because the bees which fertilise the bushes are dying. 10,000 acres! Where is the woodland that blueberry bushes came from? Nature does not grow in factories.

People do not flourish in crowded, walled in ghettos.

Irenaeus said: "The glory of god is a person fully alive."

As we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God; may we pray for all places where walls are built, borders are sealed, and people do not walk together. May life flourish and dance on this lonely planet of ours, to the delight of our god.... as we delight in our god...

Amen



On line articles used:

What is a Human Being? Reflections on Psalm 8 by James L. Mays.

Bone of My Bone and Flesh of My Flesh by Phyllis A. Bird.

Three is not Enough: Jewish Reflections on Trinitarian Thinking (and others, as well as my books.)