

# Trinity of Wisdom

June 15, 2025

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

John 16:12-15

Lucy Lind Hogan's commentary on this passage from John, posted at Working Preacher, made me laugh this week. She wrote, "I suspect that most in your congregation would not appreciate a sermon that began like this: 'There are things that are essential to our faith, but I can't speak about them because you would not be able to understand. They are far too complicated and way over your head.'"

So, let me check. Raise your hand or give me a nod if you'd object to a sermon that started with, "You're not going to understand this."

Well, that's a pity.

Because I'm not sure you're going to understand this.

In my defense, the reason I'm not sure you're going to understand this is because I'm not sure I understand this. It's Trinity Sunday, so we're wrestling with understanding the Trinity, not one of Christianity's simpler ideas. Further, "this" is Jesus' promise given in John 16:30 that the Spirit of truth will come, and will guide the disciples into all the truth.

Have you noticed how difficult truth is?

Cheryl Lindsay writes at UCC.org, "What is truth? The dictionary relates truth to fact and reality. Yet, disputes over facts and attempts to hide or dismiss reality may challenge our understanding of truth. Individuals speak of their truth as if it were a choice or varied based on perspective, experience, and acceptance. Is there such a thing as a shared reality when so much of human life is highly segmented and fractured?"

Lord, I hope so. While I grant the possibility of alternate realities – I'm a fan of science fiction, after all – it's awfully difficult to live in more than one reality at a time. I also grant the existence of unknown reality, when we simply don't know what reality is, and so different ideas of what it might be all have at least some validity. I certainly grant the existence of different notions of reality, some of which might be correct, or partially correct, or just plain incorrect.

At ground, though, I tend to assume that there is a reality, a truth, to the universe around us. While a vast amount of it might be unknown – it's a big universe, after all – there's a lot of truth that we do know and that we can know.

A couple hundred years of experience, for example, teaches us that vaccination significantly reduces the spread and the intensity of infectious disease. According to the National Library of Medicine, the 1853 smallpox outbreak in Hawai'i was the third worst epidemic in Hawaiian history. It killed 5,000 people. There hasn't been a case of smallpox since 1977 anywhere in the world, and that's because of vaccination. Those who claim vaccines cause rather than prevent disease are wrong.

They are not telling the truth.

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide us into all the truth. I might wish that the Holy Spirit would just give us all the truth, but that's not what Jesus said and it certainly isn't our experience, is it? We have to work at truth. We have to ask questions. We have to evaluate competing answers. We have to compare the assertions of different sources, take a look at how it matches with our experience, and consider whether our experience might be deceptive. People had considered and even practiced inoculation for smallpox for some time in Asia, Africa, India, and Europe, but most people considered making somebody a little bit sick to prevent getting very sick to be dangerous. It wasn't until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the practice gained wider acceptance and not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that it knocked smallpox out entirely.

With anti-vaccination people in positions of power and exercising that power to restrict and discourage vaccination, we're going to see more illness. We're going to see more death. That's truth.

Truth is not wholly revealed by observation and experimentation. For one thing, our observation has limits, and our experiments can't always account for all the potential circumstances. Science always looks for predictable phenomena: I do this, and this happens. But if there's more than what I do that changes in an experiment and I don't know it, my predictions don't work.

That makes the truth of people – or of one person – really difficult to understand.

It makes the truth of God, with whom we are in relationship and within whom there is a relationship that we call "the Trinity," really difficult to understand.

But maybe, just maybe, there are dimensions of the Trinity that we can understand, or accept, or even rejoice in.

Meda Stamper writes at Working Preacher, "The Trinity presented to us in John is a manifestation of God's love for us, a way of opening a door to the mystery of God that allows us to see ourselves embraced by it." When Jesus spoke to his disciples it was in perilous times. They may not have seen it as clearly as he did – they asked "What did he mean by this?" pretty often during his farewell address – but nobody who had been with Jesus in Jerusalem had any illusions about the danger. Jesus' arrest didn't come as a surprise.

Jesus offered reassurance, the reassurance of the Spirit's presence, and the reassurance of the Spirit's truth, as a sign of his own love and God's own love for them.

The Trinity is love.

As well as love, Jesus' words extended hope. As Timothy L. Adkins-Jones writes at Working Preacher, "Maybe through tears of his own, and possibly to weeping disciples, Jesus offers hope to those that he loves. In a world where loss, anxiety, and fear are legion, there will be no shortage of disciples in our midst who are in need of reassurance. Our mission seems to be to offer ways that the relationship Jesus describes in this passage, between Himself, the Father, and the Spirit, brings hope to an anxious people instead of wrestling with the particulars of the Trinity."

I've said more than once that hope as a Christian concept or virtue is not a feeling. It's a choice. When I hope, I look at what is before me and decide that it does not need to be this way. It can be better. It might be pretty much okay, but it can be better. Or it might be really bad, and I choose to believe it can be better. I choose hope. I choose to work toward my hope.

Choose hope, my friends, Jesus told them.

The Trinity is hope.

Jesus' words to his disciples continued past where our reading ends at verse 15. "You have pain now," he told them, "but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you."

In the midst of that solemn night with its confusion and its sense of threat, Jesus promised joy. At JourneyWithJesus.net, Amy Frykholm writes about establishing a food pantry during the COVID pandemic in Leadville, Colorado: "To cross a mountain stream, you must seek those few rocks that will remain firmly in place, that are flat enough to afford a foothold. We likened our development of the food pantry to looking for these 'joy' rocks. What can we do with enough joy, enough letting go, enough delight that we can stay steady while we cross this stream? If we saw ourselves falling into obligation, we'd ask, 'Is this a joy rock?' If the answer was no, then we looked for another route."

Joy. That's important. It's a vital part of the journey; it's a vital part of the work. It's a vital element of truth itself. If someone's truth claim perverts justice, threatens harm, or promises suffering, if it lacks joy or subverts joy, it is not true. Read the witness of Proverbs' figure of Wisdom who, during Creation, "was beside God, like a master worker, and I was daily his delight, playing before him always, playing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race."

Wisdom – Truth – the Holy Spirit – the Trinity – is joy.

Joy. Hope. Love. That's a Trinity of Truth. It's worth confessing. It's worth proclaiming. It's worth living.

It's a Trinity of Wisdom.

Amen.

*by Eric Anderson*