

Holy Trinity - Sunday, June 12, 2022

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15

“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.”
(Rom 5:3-5)

This is written by a travelling preacher in the first century named Paul. He’s writing a letter to the Christians in Rome; people he hasn’t met but he hopes to meet some day. He’s writing to people who will know some day soon what it means to suffer, if they don’t already know. And as he writes this letter, he remembers everything that has happened to him:

He’s been arrested and tortured, and there have been times when he’s been forced to flee to escape persecution; he’s been a refugee. He’s been shipwrecked, he’s been dragged out of the city and pelted with rocks and left for dead because powerful people were threatened by what he taught. His citizenship in his own country has been questioned, he’s been accused by Jews and Christians – all his own people - of being unfaithful or just plain wrong, and he’s been thrown in prison. He’s suffered all kinds of things that should have crushed him, but he has kept on, and he has not lost hope.

So as he looks for words to express how he hasn’t lost hope, what he comes up with is something like this: His hope has survived because God’s love has been poured out all over him, like water in a baptismal font; the Spirit of God has been poured out all over him, and because of that his hope has survived and he has not given up.

Paul hasn’t survived because he read a book or heard a lecture or figured out an idea. He hasn’t survived because he’s a plucky stick-to-it kind of guy. He hasn’t

survived because he had a good plan. There's just this Spirit of God who has kept his hope alive when he should have given up hope. And Paul writes about this to people he hasn't met but who might know exactly what he's talking about, and who might need to hear that the Spirit will carry them through too. He's writing to any of us who find that the grief is too strong or the fear won't let up. He's writing to a church that wonders if it will survive. He's writing to indigenous people who should have given up but who keep on insisting that things must change and can change and who keep on trying to get the rest of us to listen. He's writing for the people of Ukraine or Yemen or Selkirk and Main who might just give up. And he's not saying something like "If at first you don't succeed, try and try again." He just saying something as simple as this: The Spirit of the risen Jesus has kept on breathing among us and has carried us through. The Spirit of the risen Jesus will carry you through too.

And here's the thing that we might miss: When Paul writes all this, it's always "we" and "us." *We* have peace, *we* have tasted grace, *we* have hope, *we* have suffered, hope does not disappoint *us*, God's love has been poured into *our* hearts. He writes to a community that will need encouragement, and he knows all about community. He was in prison with a bunch of other people. When he was shipwrecked he was shipwrecked with a community. He didn't travel alone, and wherever he travelled he was welcomed by a community. That's how the Spirit of the risen Christ works – among us, in this community God creates to care for one another and to help care for the world. The Spirit is poured out on *us*. *For us*. *For the world where we live*.

We're still living through a pandemic. We, as a community. We have no idea what our future holds – we, as a community, as a church – but the Spirit has

been poured out on us. The Spirit gives us each other, gives us to our neighbours and gives our neighbours to us. We're not alone in this. That's how the Spirit works.

That's how it's always been. Last week and this week we heard pieces of Jesus' last words to his disciples. They've sat down together for a meal, and only Jesus really has any idea that this is their last meal together. For three or four entire chapters now he's been trying to tell his closest circle of friends what's on his mind as he's about to leave them and to be arrested and taken from them. He tries so hard to reassure them and to give them all the teaching and the encouragement that he can, and sometimes it sounds muddled and confusing because any of us might stumble over our words when we know that they are our last words. He wants to give his friends something that will keep their faith strong and keep their hope alive when everything around them is falling apart. Maybe he's trying to assure himself too.

So he tells them that he'll send them his own Spirit, the Spirit of God, who will remind them who they are and who Jesus is, and who will give them peace and forgiveness just as he has already given these things to them. It's all his way of assuring them and assuring himself that things will be OK. Really, they'll be OK. And the Spirit that he sends will keep their faith – your faith, our faith – alive. Even when it seems like Jesus is nowhere to be found, and faith is lost or hope seems to be gone, he promises a Spirit who will carry us along and keep us going and keep our hope alive. It'll be OK.

And here's the thing that we might miss (there's always a thing that we might miss.): Jesus says all this as he and some friends sit down together for a meal. No one is left alone there. Jesus makes a community of people, and promises

that his Spirit will be given to that community to support them, to teach them, to encourage them, to be with them. Jesus makes a community of us, and promises to support us, and teach us, and encourage us, and give us our life together.

Because that's how God works with us: gives us life, takes on flesh to come and live with us, gives us the Spirit, gives us each other, gives us to the world. In some way, it's all about community.

4 It's Holy Trinity Sunday today; the only Sunday in the church year that is dedicated to a doctrine. Or so it seems. I remember my very first confirmation class in my very first parish. I was fairly fresh out of seminary, and when it came time to study the Apostles' Creed I had a great session prepared for all those Grade Seven students about God the three in one, and about how there are three persons who are one God, who are distinct from each other and but can't be divided from each other, who are coeternal and so on and so on. I knew how to explain all the relationships between Father Son and Holy Spirit, and I was glad to help that class understand, and I knew that they would love it. They didn't. When it was all over I wondered why it just didn't seem to work, and over the years I hoped now and then that I hadn't bored them too much or even bored them right out of the church.

Over the years since then I've learned something more about Trinity though, and it's really not all about being a doctrine (even if the doctrine stuff is interesting and cool and important and let's sit down and talk about it sometime).

It's like this: There have been times, and there still are, when I struggle with faith and wonder what it's really all about if it's about anything at all, and there has always been a community around me that expresses its faith and carries me along. It's been the same when I've grieved and someone's love has gotten me through

the day, or when I've celebrated and someone has brought cake or a cookie, when a community of two or three or a dozen or more has struggled or celebrated with me. It's community that's carried me along.

I've seen it in the church when we have coffee together in the narthex or call each other when pandemic keeps us apart. We've seen it in the world, where it's not just individuals who struggle against racism or injustice or poverty, but it's entire communities of people who live together and find strength together. We'll even see it on Saturday when some people gather for a Bike Bazaar in a church parking lot, to help each other out and work on life together. All these things happen in community.

And that's what's going on with all this Trinity talk. God doesn't stand alone and apart and solitary and strong. God is three persons, three people, in relationship with each other. God is a community. And God makes a community of us, of creation, of the world. Where the gifts of life are shared. Where the Spirit breathes among us and we care for each other. Where the Spirit of the risen Jesus moves among us and raises us from death. Where the Holy Trinity, one God, three persons together, is making all people, all community, all the church, all creation, all things new.

AMEN.