

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!
 A sermon by David Roquemore
 First Presbyterian Church, Newton NC
 June 12, 2022

Proverbs 8: 1-4, 22-31

Well, once upon a time I used to preach these long technical sermons on the Trinity. You know, “the Father is all that the Son is, except Son, and the Son is all that the Father is, except Father.” These were what my dear wife used to call, “nice philosophy papers,” but they didn’t do much for anyone’s practical personal spiritual life.

I don’t plan on doing that today, but today is Trinity Sunday. I may slip off into that stuff yet.

Does Proverbs 8 refer to Christ, the Son of God? Arius thought so, and he was the sometimes bishop of Alexandria. He was bishop until his thought was found heretical, and Athanasius became the bishop. They went back and forth until finally, at one of the Councils, Athanasius’ thought and interpretation became the accepted one. Arius you see taught that Christ the Son of God was a creature; a very high creature, but nonetheless, a created being. “There was a time when he was not,” was Arius’ phrase. That’s all fascinating, if you like history. I recommend you read up on it. But back to our question: does Proverbs 8 refer to Christ? Yes, but not in the way Arius took it.

Proverbs 8 describes wisdom, and does so in anthropological terms: wisdom is like a person who stands by and helps God in all that God does. Wisdom in Hebrew is “chochmah” and in Greek, “Sophia.” Both are feminine words, and so some of the really radical feminists like to talk about the Second Person of the Trinity as Sophia-Christ, or something like that. You can do that if you want to but be careful! (Though I will point out that the big ancient cathedral in Istanbul is called “Hagia Sophia” or the Church of Holy Wisdom.)

So Wisdom stands by and watches what God does. Specifically, wisdom helps in creation. Now, this creation is described here, but what we read reflects the ancient Near Eastern understanding of the universe. There is nothing but water, but in this water, God has created a bubble, with the earth as the bottom and the firmament as the top. When for example the Flood came, what God did was open up the firmament so that water could pour in. This is very different from our understanding of the planets and solar system!

This wisdom of God stands by and watches, rejoicing in the goodness and creativity of God. Let’s be clear, this wisdom is understood here as a person, not as some abstract quality of God. Solomon, or whoever wrote this, could have phrased it that way, but he didn’t. He made wisdom a person, which we read as Jesus Christ, or more correctly, as the Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity.

Wisdom is a person, with his own subsistence, yet one with the Father. Like Christ!

Christ is also eternal; the text here says that he was brought forth ‘before the world was created,’ hence before time. He is eternal. He was there before the mountains, before the seas, before the sky — before the cosmos was created, he was.

Not only that, but he helped make the world. He is the Architect of the world. Christ is the one who executes the Father’s commands. He is the expression of God’s will, and so he is the Word. Just as the Gospel of John notes, “in the beginning was the Word.”

I know, a lot of people in this town will say that we need a church that is loyal to the Word of God, the Bible. And we are, but the Bible is not the Word of God! Jesus Christ is the Word of God. The Bible is a witness to that word. We take the Bible seriously, yes, but finally the Word of God is Jesus Christ himself.

Jesus is the Word of God, the expression of God’s will on earth. In him everything that God does, that God wants, that God intends, on earth, is made clear. We see God’s action when we see what Jesus does. We see God’s love for us when we see what Jesus does and says. We see the grace of God when we look at his death and resurrection.

Jesus, the Wisdom of God, delights in the creatures that God has made. He delights in us, even with our sin. He forgives our sin and calls us to life with him.

Jesus didn’t just “die for our sins,” but he died to reconcile the cosmos to God the Father!

There is no hint of a punishment that had to be satisfied, or was exacted by an angry Father. We hear people talk about God’s honor and purity that is offended by sin, and so sin must be punished! We hear about an angry God, who takes his wrath out on Jesus, rather than on us. Hmmmm.

That’s the one we all learned. That’s the one Billy Graham preached at every crusade. That’s what most of us believe Christianity is. God is wrathful and takes that out on Jesus, so that we can avoid the punishment for our sin. Once Jesus dies, we take refuge in him, and of course, when “God looks at us he sees only Jesus, who died in our place.” You may be surprised to learn that this is the legacy of St. Anselm, in the 11th century! He wrote a book called, *Cur Deus Homo*, or, *Why God Became Man*. In that book he details what comes to be known as the Penal Substitution Theory of the Atonement. Jesus dies for a higher reason than appeasing an angry God.

That is Anselm, though we have had a millennium’s practice at reading his theory back into the New Testament. It is hard to change age-old ways of thinking, but we can do it! God the Father is not angry at us — he is love, and exists as love. God the Father loves us, period. God delights in the dance of the Spirit and Son with him as Father. God delights in the world he has created and redeemed.

Some of this comes from the notions that theologians developed over the years about the immutability of God, his unchanging nature. He seems angry and wrathful because of his unchanging purity. All of that makes sense, but seems to ignore the pleas, for

example, of the agonizing God of Hosea 11. Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann says we should always pay attention to the verbs, that God is active and mysterious, his ways are unknown to us!

God agonizes over creation marred by sin, and wants it to be resolved into the love he has for us in Jesus Christ. God the Father desperately wants fellowship with all of us. The Spirit calls us into that fellowship. Jesus shows us how it looks. In all that we see and know of the Triune God, this is true.

Well, we have gotten fairly far afield from Proverbs. But what can we take from this? First, be aware of the Wisdom of God, and of the participation in the Trinity “behind the scenes” as it were in all of life. God rarely comes down like the mighty Thor, descending from the heights in terrible storms and signs. God is mostly like the homeless guy you barely notice. God is like the one who takes care of things, when no one is looking. Look for God’s sense of humor, for you will begin to see it.

As you walk through life, be aware of the Spirit who lives inside you, of Jesus who walks with you, of the Father, whose benevolent hand gives you all kinds of good gifts. You are never alone!

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost! Amen.