

Pastor Gregory P. Fryer  
Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY  
5/22/2016, Trinity Sunday  
Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is Trinity Sunday. For my text, I have chosen a passage from our First Lesson, from Proverbs 8. The traditional interpretation of this text links it with Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Especially I am drawn to the concluding verses of our reading. They go this way:

when he [the LORD] established the fountains of the deep,  
<sup>29</sup>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,  
<sup>30</sup>then I was beside him, like a master worker;  
and I was daily his delight,  
rejoicing before him always,  
<sup>31</sup>rejoicing in his inhabited world  
and *delighting in the human race*. (Proverbs 8:28-31, NRSV)

The Doctrine of the Trinity teaches us that we have “one God in three persons.” That means that we join Israel and Islam in the conviction that there is only one God. But we conceive this God as love (1 John 4:8), and love involves persons – more than one. In the case of the Holy Trinity, we believe in one God, but in three divine persons who love one another AND, glad to say, love us! We have three divine persons fighting on our side – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are different persons, with different roles to play on our behalf. But they play their various roles in a coordinated, harmonious way. They are like a string trio, with skill and attentiveness between the violin, viola, and cello. It is only one piece of music, one string trio, but it is the joint work of three voices, the violin, the viola, and the cello. On a more majestic scale, there is only one God, but he consists in the joint work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – an ultimately beautiful and joyful work they do on our behalf.

This morning’s reading from Proverbs 8 permits us to look at one of the divine persons – the Son – and to look at him as the incarnation of Wisdom. You will note that this reading refers to Wisdom in the feminine:

<sup>1</sup>Does not wisdom call,  
and does not understanding raise *her* voice? (Proverbs 8:1, NRSV)

Apparently this not a simple grammatical point about the word “wisdom” in Hebrew, but more along the lines of a substantial claim about the Lord’s wisdom:

it is appropriate to refer to that wisdom as “she.”<sup>1</sup> About this, I can only say that it sounds right to me. I think women are smart! Jesus Christ is a man, yes, but it seems fine to me to refer to the Wisdom within him, or within any of us, as feminine. I simply yield to the Bible on this.

Now let’s turn to the great claim our text makes about God’s wisdom. It says that she rejoices and delights in creation, including us human beings:

<sup>30</sup>...I was beside him, like a master worker;  
and I was daily his delight,  
rejoicing before him always,  
<sup>31</sup>rejoicing in his inhabited world  
and delighting in the human race.

There is a whole lot of rejoicing going on here. Wisdom says that she was with the LORD “like a master worker” and that she “was daily his delight.” This links up with a theme we encounter more than once in the story of Jesus – the testimony of the Father concerning the Son at the Baptism and at the Transfiguration of Jesus:

And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my *beloved* Son,  
in whom I am *well pleased*. (Matthew 3:17, KJV)

So, in our text, the LORD is delighted by Wisdom at his side as a master worker.

But Wisdom herself is also delighted. She is delighted in the LORD’s creation and in human beings:

<sup>30</sup>...I was beside him, like a master worker;  
and I was daily his delight,  
rejoicing before him always,  
<sup>31</sup>rejoicing in his inhabited world  
and delighting in the human race.

From time to time, the New Testament tells us something about the emotions of Jesus. Especially we can think of our Lord’s compassion:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them,  
because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a  
shepherd. (Matthew 9:36, RSV)

---

<sup>1</sup> Significantly, too, she is portrayed as a woman. This is not simply due to the fact that the Hebrew term for wisdom, *hokmah*, is feminine, or that the wisdom teachings seem so male oriented. The teachings are destined and applicable for all, male and female. We really have no answer as to why wisdom is personified as a woman... (Roland Murphy in *The Lectionary Commentary: Theological Exegesis for Sunday's Texts, The First Readings: The Old Testament and Acts: 001* (Kindle Locations 4346-4348). Kindle Edition.

Jesus had compassion for the crowds, and had had compassion for the individual sufferer. For example, when he crosses the funeral procession of a young man, Jesus has sorrow for the mother:

And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” (Luke 7:13, RSV)

His sorrow for the grieving mother moved Jesus to raise the boy back up to life.

So, we read of the compassion of Jesus. Also, we can bring to mind the wrenching Gethsemane scene, where Jesus, the Bible says, was in “agony”:

And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. (Luke 22:44, KJV)

But aside from these few passages about the compassion of Jesus and his anguish in Gethsemane, we do not read a lot in the Bible about the emotions of Jesus. The Bible calmly reports remarkable things about Jesus – things that sound very much like this morning’s reading from Proverbs 8. For example, St. John calmly reports that Jesus *is* the master worker beside the LORD in creation:

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>The same was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. (John 1:1-3, KJV)

And St. Paul can calmly report that Jesus *is* God’s wisdom:

<sup>24</sup>...Christ the power of God and the *wisdom of God*... (1 Corinthians 1:24, RSV)

In general, the New Testament does not give us much insight to the happiness of Jesus or to what gives him joy. But this great text from Proverbs 8 does. It goes on to tell us that Jesus rejoices and delights in the human race.

Notice that the text does *not* say that Wisdom delights in the *saints* among the human race. I am sure that Wisdom does delight in the saints. But what Proverbs 8 says is more broad. It says that Wisdom delights in the human race, which is composed of both saints and sinners.

Delight is the happy side of love. When my sons were little boys, they delighted me. They still do because I love them. My wife Carol delights me. When she comes home at the end of the work day, she is a sight for sore eyes for me. Just looking at her lifts my heart.

When you and I receive the Blessed Sacrament a few minutes from now, Jesus will look upon us with compassion for any suffering that we might be going through, with frustration at any sin we might be indulging, but also with delight at the sheer sight of us, because he loves us. He does not begrudge us our freedom. He seems to look on at us with extreme interest, rejoicing in our lives, rejoicing in what we are up to, especially rejoicing in us when we have been trying to fight the good fight of faith.

If it were not for this morning's passage about Wisdom delighting in the human race, I bet we would think that there is only solemnity in the heart of Jesus as he looks upon us. It is a wonderful notion – this idea that Jesus can see us *as we are*, with our relentless mixture of good and bad... that his wisdom can permit him to see us truly, exactly as we are, and yet that he could still delight in us. Parents watch their children taking their first steps, and rejoice to see that striving. The kids fall down, but get up again, and the parents are glad to see it. The children do wrong, apologize, and the parents are delighted to see them get back on track. We ourselves look at our city — at this whirling dervish of a city — and for many of us, we “delight in the human race.” It is a heartbreak of a human race, in many ways, but also it is a joy. We wouldn't trade our town for anything.

So, that is the main thing I wanted to lift up about our reading from Proverbs: it lead us to think that the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, our Lord Jesus, takes delight in our human race.

The other thing I want to say refers to Wisdom in the classical sense of cleverness — of Jesus being able to see the end from the beginning, of Jesus being intelligent enough to cause all things to work together for our good (Romans 8:28). St. Paul is relying of Christ's wisdom here in our Epistle Reading — in his great saying about suffering and the good chain of consequences it has. The passage goes this way:

we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,<sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope... (Romans 5:3-4, RSV)

This chain of consequences is not a matter of luck. It is not simply built into the structure of reality that suffering produces endurance and then character and hope. This sequence is not a matter of luck, but rather a matter of Jesus being intelligent enough to turn even our suffering into good account, if we be willing. There is nothing in this whole, wide world that is too tough for Jesus. There is nothing that can thwart his plan to pull our human race onwards and onwards until at last we reach the Kingdom of God. And there is nothing so awful that can happen to you and me as individuals that is beyond his healing. He is smart enough to convert even our suffering into the building blocks of his kingdom. And I think the best we can do is to be smart enough to throw in our lot with him. He will be grateful for our efforts and he will delight in us, human beings that we, trying to serve him, to

whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever.  
Amen.