

GOD'S JOURNEY

John 16: 12-15; Romans 5: 1-11; Psalm 8

Have you ever been on a journey? I'm sure you have. We all have. The word 'journey' has become a very popular way of describing life. Of course, a journey is also something many of us think of more literally. We travel. We love to describe all the places we go, the things we see, and the experiences we have. We take pictures and post them.

But the word 'journey' is also a way of describing an inner process. Whether we've gone through something traumatic, or a new kind of experience, or whether it's about a relationship or an illness, describing the journey and reflecting on the journey is a way of finding inner meaning, purpose, growth, healing, insight, acceptance and peace. I'm sure any one of us can talk about our journey of life through many situations, circumstances and relationships in our lives – changes we've experienced, losses, opportunities we've taken on, decisions we've made and then reflecting on the consequences and the learning.

Well, 'journey' is also a good word to describe God the way the bible tells the story of God. And this is important because today in the church year is 'Trinity Sunday.' As Christians, we confess God is one like other faiths such as Islam and Judaism. But as Christians we also confess that God is three. Three means God is plural. How can God be one and yet also three? Why complicate God?

Well, in order to understand how we came up with the doctrine of the Trinity as Christians, we need to understand the journey of God as the bible describes it. As Christians, we recognize this journey in three parts.

Part 1. God above:

Psalm 8 is a great description of what God above can mean. To experience God above is to experience God's greatness as creator of all that is. When we truly contemplate the wonders of our world, and when we open ourselves to see in all that is a creative force that is love, we are opening ourselves to God above. We pray to such a God and seek the creative power of God's love to fill us, strengthen us and guide us throughout our life journeys. We need God above us because we are only human. Even as we have unique abilities and possibilities, we are also vulnerable creatures.

Psalm 8 captures this paradox beautifully: "O God, our God, how glorious is your name over all the earth! When I look at the heavens, the moon and the stars which you have created – who are we that you should be mindful of us, that you should care for us?" And yet, you have "crowned us with glory and honour." You have given us rule over the work of your hands, giving us responsibility for the earth, to care for it in partnership with you. What an awesome gift and privilege for us vulnerable creatures.

Our journey through life in relationship with the God above is a journey of discovering our purpose as creatures created out of love, to love in return. How spiritually alive is your relationship with God above? How do you commune with and pray to God above?

This brings us to part two of God's journey.

Part 2. God beside:

We as human beings mess things up for all our ability and possibility. We make mistakes and if that's not bad enough, we compound our mistakes by denying them, justifying our actions, blaming others, blaming circumstances or shutting ourselves down in shame rather than taking responsibility. That's our story. But since we are connected with God, God's story evolves in relationship to our story. How is God above going to engage our failures and mistakes? Will God destroy us in God's wrath at all the hurt and harm we are so good at committing? Or will God find another way with us?

This is where our second reading from Romans gives us a sample of the next move in the story of God, namely, God beside us in the person of Jesus Christ. God chooses to engage our failure and our mistakes by coming to be where we are rather than demanding we go where God is and then punishing us for failing to make it. Jesus comes as a particular human being vulnerable just like any of us. And yet, Jesus also carries in him this infinite love of God which he embodies in a way that can transform us.

As Christians, we make the audacious claim that God's true heart is revealed in this move of God from being above us to also coming beside us, to live as we live, share our lives in their ups and downs, their possibility and their pain, the good and the evil around us and in us too. In Jesus, God comes to be beside us. In theological terms, we call this incarnation. God incarnate in the human Jesus.

Our reading from Romans speaks about this Jesus opening up a new door to God, a new way to find redemption through all the mistakes and failures of life. To have faith in Jesus as God's way with us is to have faith that God's love will find a way to rebuild relationship with us when we have failed: 'therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand...'

Instead of continuing to deny, repress, justify, blame or shame our way through life, we open ourselves to be forgiven, and forgiven even when we have been enemies of God rather than friends: 'For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us... And so, 'if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God' through Christ, 'much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.'

Nothing we can do will push God away from reaching out to us as God beside us. Christ's death was a great act of injustice. Maybe most of us are not like the religious leaders who hated Jesus enough to

kill an innocent man, or like the Romans who cared for nothing but maintaining their power and control. But many of us can be like Jesus' disciples who were too scared to stand up with him and for him, or like the crowds who will take Jesus as long as they get miracles, but reject him when he calls them to find even greater purpose in giving than getting for themselves.

God above us also comes to be God beside us. God above us we pray to for strength, love, empowerment to be and do, for healing and for peace. With God beside us we have the added movement of forgiveness which opens the door to a new way of engaging our mistakes and failures. We don't have to be stuck in denial, in blame or in shame. If Christ crucified can forgive, then it means God seeks a new way of connecting with us and blessing us beyond anything we can do to mess things up. Are you prepared to start again and again with God beside you as Jesus opening the way?

But the journey still has one more part for God and for us.

Part 3. God within:

The final part of God's journey is to find a home within us. No longer are we simply praying to God above as if God is distant, and no longer are we just following Jesus as if Jesus is outside us. We also have God inside us, communing with us in the most intimate way through our inner discernment, our conscience, our heart, our mind, our inner passion and compassion, our conversion to forgiving as we are forgiven. This is God within. We have what we need to grow spiritually and to face whatever comes our way through life. God is always with us because God is in us. Do you recognize God within you?

John's gospel makes this movement from God above and God beside to God within very explicit. Our lesson this morning is an example. Jesus tells his followers this: 'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you in all truth; for he will not speak on his own, but whatever he hears... All that the Father has is mine...' The Spirit will 'take what is mine and declare it to you.' From God above, to Christ beside, to the Spirit within... God surrounds us and flows through us when we are in prayerful and worshipful communion with God. We pray to God above, through Christ beside, and experience the transforming power of the Spirit within.

OK Preacher. You've given us some fine words. But how does the journey of God and our own human journey connect? Let me give an example. Many of us have been following the news over the past few years on the national inquiry on the hundreds of missing and murdered indigenous women. The final report that has just come out has concluded that what has happened is part of a larger genocide committed by Canada over 100 plus years, based on policies aimed at eradicating indigenous peoples, by eliminating their culture and identity and enforcing assimilation. We usually think of other countries as places of genocide – Rwanda, Bosnia, Nazi Germany, Turkey... but Canada? And yet, the government has had the courage, at least, to accept this judgement. What it will do about it is another matter yet to be determined.

As Christians, though, how would God's journey as we tell it in our reading of scripture, provide inspiration for our own journey as Canadians in relationship to indigenous peoples of this land? First of all, we share with indigenous spirituality a faith in God as creator. Through the wonders of creation and our own hearts, we recognize that we must return to love as the foundation and source of genuine life and genuine relationship.

Second, we have messed up. We have alienated ourselves from creation and claimed power for ourselves not to love, but to control, rule and demolish all that is not appropriated for our own purposes. Whether it's creation itself or indigenous peoples themselves, we need to repent and seek out forgiveness, healing and reconciliation through a decisive change in our relationships. Hence we need Jesus who guides us and shares his life at great cost. It costs to forgive. But it is a gift, a gift that opens doors, doors toward healing and hopefully, reconciliation and change. There is no future without forgiveness.

Thirdly, the journey is incomplete without the Spirit. The Spirit of God in Jesus must finally come to dwell within us as we create space within. Cleansed and renewed through love and forgiveness, we connect with brothers and sisters, indigenous brothers and sisters, as people now motivated in our purposes and goals by the divine Spirit, not our own ego-driven and control-driven spirits. Do you see how the journey goes? We need to make this kind of journey again and again as we navigate life in every situation, relationship and crisis.

The Holy Trinity which is our name for God is not just about God's journey. It's the biblical blueprint for our own journey in life too. Our relationship to God and our own journeys are connected. To experience God fully above, beside and within us is to make a journey. As we connect with God in prayer and worship, we discover more deeply who we are, in all our beauty, but also in all our failure and fear. And as we experience the healing and empowerment of forgiveness, we grow a deeper intimacy with God inside as we move out into the world emboldened by love. Isn't that powerful?

May God inspire us as we need to be inspired. In our fears, our uncertainty, our possibilities and opportunities, our high points of joy and our low points of despair... God surrounds us, is beside us and flows in and through us. Do you recognize God in your life this way? Amen.