

“Above, Among , Within”

A Sermon Preached by Rev. Young-Mee Park
At First United Methodist Church of Oak Park
Trinity Sunday, May 30, 2010

Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice? On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out: "To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live. The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth-- when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil. When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, 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, then I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race. (Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31)

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 into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:12-15)

When and where do you perceive or experience the presence or nearness of God with most vivid power? Where do you go to find God? Or better, when, where and how does God come to meet you? I know, these are not “dime” questions. But I still would like to do a quick survey. Does anyone have any answers? Is anybody willing to share?

Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts this morning. I asked the same questions through our weekly e-newsletter last week. Thank you so much to those of you who took time to reflect and reply. We all are companions, or fellow travelers, on the road of faith. We learn and grow from one another’s stories, experiences, and perspectives, do we not? I learn so much from you. You truly broaden my mind and enrich my relationship with God and the world. Last week’s quick survey and today’s sharing were not exceptions. I am amazed to hear about so many different ways in which you perceive or experience God.

Some of you perceive God’s presence primarily when you are alone and quiet, while others find God in people’s lives or actions. Some of you feel close to God when you worship or when we kneel and pray, while others experience a keen sense of God’s presence in the beauty of nature or art. Some of you find God in the Bible or in the proclamation of

the word, while others are touched by symbols, rituals, and sacraments. Some of you become more aware of God's presence when you are sad, frightened, or in trouble, while for others it is rather in moments of joy and excitement. Some of you experience God in a mystic way, while for others, learning something new about God with your mind is a deep spiritual experience.

Why don't we do a little survey here, with easier-to-answer questions, this time? One of you wrote me last week in response to the questions mentioned in the beginning of my sermon today: *"Next time you send a survey, send out multiple choice questions, dear. These questions are too hard!"* Very good advice, isn't it? I will ask you a few questions. These are not exactly multiple choice questions, but you can raise your hand when a statement applies to you. OK?

1. How many of you perceive God's presence in natural beauty?
2. How many of you experience God in the beauty of music or other forms of art?
3. How many of you encounter God in the solitude of quiet moments?
4. How many of you see God in people's concrete lives and actions?
5. How many of you sense God's close presence while in worship or in prayer?
6. How many of you hear God talking to you when reading the Bible or hearing the word proclaimed?
7. How many of you find that thinking critically about spiritual matters is a deeply enriching experience?
8. How many of you experience God in symbols, rituals, and sacraments, such as Holy Communion?
9. How many of you experience the assurance of God's presence and peace when you are in trouble and at your wit's end?

Thank you! Now, let's see how many questions you got right. How many of you raised your hand just once? How many of you raised your hand twice? More than twice? Thank you! I see that many of you answered yes to more than two or three questions. Congratulations! You all passed the test!

Did you know that according to the church's calendar, today is Trinity Sunday. Not just for our young people, but for most Christians, the Trinity is one of the most sophisticated, difficult, and abstract topics of theology. Three in one, one in three, it does not make sense, does it? Some even think that the Christian belief in the Trinity is a strange, unreasonable, and even irrelevant formula to be relegated to a scholar's study.

However, did you know that what you have just expressed by your multiple showing of hands was nothing other than the profession of your Trinitarian faith, that is, your faith in One God who is revealed, and can be experienced, in various ways? Traditionally, the threefold revelation of God is referred to by the terms *"Father," "Son,"* and *"Holy Spirit,"* but I do not think that it is forbidden to name them, *"God-Above-Us," "God-Among-Us,"* and *"God-Within-Us,"* or *"God, our Creator," "God, our Savior,"* and *"God, our Sanctifier."*

Many of us stand in awe and wonder before God's creation. We perceive God in the beauty of nature, in the amazing working of the human body or human conscience or creativity. Theologians often use the term "general revelation" to describe this level or

dimension of divine work also described in our first lesson today as the voice of wisdom crying out in the public square to all that live.

However, we Christians believe that God comes to us, or God reveals God-self to us, not only in general and indirect ways, but also in very special, personal, direct, and intimate ways. Yes, we believe that God's fingerprints are everywhere, in the beauty of nature and art, of course, but also in all of the events of our lives, large and small. God is there in the extraordinary; God is here in the ordinary. God is there in mystery; God is here in the mundane. God is there in beauty; God is here in the ugly and messy. God's graceful hand is at work in creation; God's love is made flesh and living among us in Christ Jesus; God's Spirit lives within us, with her refreshing and sanctifying power, right here and right now, in this beautiful but hurting world.

The challenge put before us the Christians on this Trinity Sunday is not so much about how to make sense of the impossible mathematics of "one in three" and "three in one." Rather, the question is how we should grow into more holistic and wholesome life of faith. Good for you if you often stand in awe and wonder at the beauty and majesty of God's good creation. But let us not neglect nurturing our personal relationship with Jesus, the Word-made-flesh. Good for you if you connect with Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. But let us be more receptive and open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives. Good for you if you experience the reality of the Holy Spirit as life-changing power. But let us grow deeper and stronger, firmly grounded in the Word of God.

You see? At the core of our Christian faith is the Trinity – the God who invites us to a joyful dance of three persons, God-Above-Us, God-Among-Us, and God-Within-Us! Let us join in the circle! Let us dance, to the heartbeat of our triune God! The love of God, our Creator, the grace of Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit, our Sustainer and Sanctifier, be with you now and forevermore!