

**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Trinity Sunday – 5/22/16**  
**Romans 5:1-5**  
**The Rev. Carenda Baker**

The 5 year olds' Sunday School class was busily drawing pictures during a bit of free time. As the teacher walked around looking at their art, she stopped next to Billy, and said, "What are you drawing, Billy?" "God", Billy replied, continuing to work away on his picture. "Oh," said the teacher. "You know, Billy, no one has ever seen God, so we don't really know what God looks like". "Well, you will when I'm done", responded Billy.

You have to admire Billy's self-confidence in the ability to capture something of what God might look like. The artful imagination has always been a prime vehicle for trying to convey the essence of profound experiences of beauty, mystery, and ultimate meaning.

Today's epistle reading from Paul's letter to the Romans is short, but full of heavily freighted words about God. Paul was a deep thinker. His whole letter to the Romans is a piece of exuberant and passionate thinking. Paul's writing shows he was asking deep questions like what is God up to? What does it mean that Jesus "saves"? What's behind all this, and where is it going? Paul tries, through deep thinking and use of heavily freighted words about God, to do the same thing Billy was doing with crayons and paper.

From the opening words of the book of Genesis to the close of the book of Revelation, God is on the make – meaning that God is actively seeking relationship – good and right relationships. In Genesis it begins with the essential stuff of life – wind, water, light, and soil (earth) – and moves on to plants, animals, and human beings. All of it was good, and after God finished making humankind, God looked over everything that had been created and declared it was "very good".

The first phrase Paul uses in this portion of his letter to capture the "very goodness" of God's creating power and deep desire for relationship is where he writes: ***"we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand"***. Let's sit for a moment with that phrase "this grace in which we stand". What is grace, anyway? Most people, church goers or not, have probably at least heard the hymn "Amazing Grace". Grace is God's unmerited favor, meaning we didn't ask for it or do anything to earn it. It is pure and simple God-given gift. Grace means we can't do anything to make God love us more and we can't do anything to make God love us less. God is the one who initiates and finally and forever will make all relationships right.

Every time we celebrate Holy Eucharist we begin with offering a prayer of thanksgiving to God as Creator and giver of all things good. We are the recipients of God's unmerited favor simply because God desires relationship with us and has always been in relationship with us.

The second word mentioned in this passage from Paul that points to an important truth about what God is up to is the word **“sufferings”**. Paul says that we don't have to stay stuck in the suffering that comes our way, suffering that is part of living in this world that is not whole. God does not send suffering. Yet for some, suffering *can* be a springboard or path to greater compassion and deeper reliance on, and devotion to God. But suffering does not always have that effect on the people who endure it. Anger, bitterness, despair and cutting one's self off from God and others can result from suffering, too.

It is no small thing, then, that God entered fully into the world's suffering in Jesus. Jesus saw the length and breadth of human suffering, felt the suffering – his own and others', endured suffering. All the while he chose to act in and with love. I think we can most easily recognize what God is up to in the world when we witness, and choose ourselves to act in loving, nonviolent ways towards others.

We again get this glimpse of what God is up to in the Eucharist during the Prayer of Great Thanksgiving as we are brought into the drama of Jesus' life, suffering, death, and resurrection. Here we glimpse the deep mystery of God as paradox. My dear friend and mentoring priest Barbara Hutchinson said once in a sermon that both the best and the worst part of her week is when she holds up the Host and breaks it during the Eucharist, because she feels in that moment her own participation in Jesus' death, in the continued breaking of Jesus' heart and body, and at the same time she recognizes that God brings forgiveness, new life, and healing through that brokenness. Not in spite of the brokenness. But through it. God intends and offers new life through Jesus' life laid down. This is indeed holy and unfathomable mystery. And we are receivers and partakers in this God who is a dying and risen Lord.

The third phrase that points to what God is up to comes in Paul's words: **“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”**. Eugene Peterson paraphrases it this way: “In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary – we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit.” **HOPE**. The Holy Spirit's work is seeding hope that does not disappoint because it is grounded in the love of God in Christ. The Holy Spirit instills perseverance and courage. Buys spirits. Inspires love in action. Teaches discernment and self-awareness. Challenges us to let God change our attitudes and behaviors that are not life-giving for us individually, nor life-giving for the whole human family. The Spirit's ongoing work is that of shaping us into God's Beloved Community.

There is a saying which comes from Africa that asserts, “It takes a village to raise a child.” Well, it takes a Divine community, one God in three persons, a God who wants right relationship and reconciliation with us, it takes the holy and blessed Trinity to redeem humanity from itself and the forces that oppose the goodness and full reign of God.

Here with you now for eight months, I continue to unearth and ponder many interesting questions about this parish. Have you ever wondered why the name Trinity was chosen for this church? If anyone has an answer to that I would certainly like to learn about how it was chosen. We're not named after one of the saints – Peter, Paul, Jude, John, Mark, Matthew, Luke. Not named after Mary or the Nativity, nor Redeemer or Ascension. Not Patrick or Gregory or Francis or Benedict.

Today is our patronal feast day – the feast of the Holy Trinity. It would be good for us to ponder what the implications are for us in our life together, that we bear the name “*Trinity Episcopal Church*”. What do you think God might be up to in you and me? In us as a parish? God the Creator, who fashions all things good and wants to be in right relationship with us, wants us to be in right relationship within ourselves and with each other, and the whole world. God the Redeemer, who continues to be present anywhere there is suffering – present with and for us. God present, with a face, hands and heart, acting in self-giving love – willing to be broken in order to bring others healing and new life. God the Sanctifier and Sustainer. God who comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable for the sake of forming that Beloved heavenly Community, which is partially here, but not yet fully here. That community of hope which does not disappoint because it is grounded in love. The Spirit-filled community whose sign and seal is hope - hope which moves us into the future to help bring about life as God intends it to be – just, merciful, and peaceful.

The hope for Trinity's future will always come from the One who continues to nurture and sustain us, the One who strengthens us to be the light and love of Christ in the world. St. Augustine would say during the Eucharist as he held up the bread – “Become the one you receive. Become who you are”.

On this Feast of the Holy Trinity, I close with words from the hymn known as “St. Patrick's Breastplate”:

Christ be with us, Christ within us,  
Christ behind us, Christ before us,  
Christ beside us, Christ to win us,  
Christ to comfort and restore us.

Christ beneath us, Christ above us,  
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,  
Christ in hearts of all that love us,  
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

Let us bind unto ourselves today the strong name of the Trinity, now and for always.  
May our living mirror the light and love and hope of our holy God, Triune of our Strength.