

BROOD TO PERFECTION
Sermon, June 16, 2019
Trinity Sunday (and Father's Day)
Texts: Genesis 1:1-2; Romans 8:12-17

This week I received news from Lisa, a hometown friend, that her father passed away ... just over a week before Father's Day ... after a long battle with Alzheimers. Lisa was a teenager in a Young Life club I led ... in 1977. I still think of her as sixteen years old, but she's, uh, a bit older than that now. Lisa's father was a man I greatly admired in my teen and young adult years, and he was also something of a ministry mentor for me. Bob McCook was on the professional staff of the ministry of Young Life in the first part of his career ... he was a gifted speaker, a passionately and pleasantly engaging man with an intensely contagious faith, and in fact, he gave the sermon at my October 21, 1984 Service of Ordination to the ministry.

Bob eventually left Young Life to pioneer a unique ministry to men called "Priority One", a ministry that would eventually go on to involve thousands of men in southeastern Pennsylvania over the next twenty or so years in seminars, retreats, and Bible study fellowships. Bob liked to describe his rather unique work as that of a "consultant," more specifically, as a **Priority Consultant**. At the risk of oversimplifying, I'll just say his calling could be basically described as doing what it took to encourage and exhort men to put their priorities in order: God, Spouse, Family, Career ... in that order. This is a sermon in itself, but we men often get those priorities in the exact reverse order ... work comes first, providing for the family second, giving loving attention to the spouse third, and devotion to God finishes a distant fourth, if that. But when we do that, when first things aren't first, everything else is out of order, and we men and our families pay the price. When we don't have FIRST THINGS FIRST, we poison our own wells. "FIRST THINGS FIRST!" That's how it should be. Because if we don't have first things first, then everything ... *everything* ... is out of order. Everything loses its proper place, and life becomes disordered. And now, please hold that thought for a moment.,

This is Trinity Sunday. "Trinity" describes the one God we know as Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit. The chances are pretty good you all knew it's Father's Day, but most of you probably didn't know it was Trinity Sunday; this particular church holiday doesn't make quite the splash Christmas or Easter does. You probably didn't get invited to any Happy Trinity parties this weekend, or decorate your house for Trinity Sunday, or go out and buy a new Trinity bonnet (*although there were tri-corner hats at the Gaspee Day parade last week!*). Today is the one Sunday on the church calendar we commemorate a distinctive, though baffling, *doctrine* of Christianity rather than an *event*. This particular doctrine differentiates Christianity from every other religion on earth. Again, "Trinity" describes the God we know as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. No, we don't worship three Gods; God is One. But He's also "... *God in three persons, blessed Trinity!*" as we sang earlier.

There are just some things about God we can only explain and understand in part this side of eternity. The finite can never fully understand the infinite, but we can rationally understand in part *something* about God's triune nature. The deeper and higher things of God may *surpass* our understanding, but that doesn't mean they *bypass* our understanding altogether. One way to begin to grasp this three in one concept is to consider this: We are made in the image of God. Each of us, made in the image of God, is comprised of a Trinity of sorts ... each of us has something of a "three in one" within ... our Mind, our Will, and our Emotions. These three "identities" can and often do "converse" and at times even conflict within one and the same person, to which anyone who has attempted to diet or exercise can attest. Just about every time I get ready to exercise, my Mind says, "*I need to do this.*" My Emotions often reply, "*I don't feel like it.*" Then my Will, which has to make the decision here and have the final say in taking action, is yanked back and forth between the Mind and the Emotions; when my Will is successful, it eventually asserts itself over the other two and reins them all in together in concert as I lace up my sneakers and head out the door.

Unlike human beings, within the Godhead, within the Trinity, there is perfect cooperation, perfect union between the three Identities. They are in perfect accord with each other, perfect communion, perfect harmony, perfect love. Now I know it's a far from perfect analogy; again, the theological doctrine of the Trinity surpasses our ability to fully understand ... after all, we are finite beings trying to fully comprehend the infinite, and it just can't be done. But this is what the Bible teaches, as probably best summarized in the words of the Nicene Creed. And the Bible tells us the God Who created in the beginning is the same God we know as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. There never was a time when the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit were not.

Genesis 1:2 is the very first reference to the Holy Spirit found in the Bible: *"The earth was formless and void, darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters."* Rather than "hovering," other translations have "moving," others "brooding." A few weeks ago, Memorial Day weekend, we sang the official hymn of the U.S. Navy. *"Eternal Father, Strong to Save."* The third stanza: *"O sacred Spirit, who didst brood upon the chaos dark and rude, Who badest its angry tumult cease, and gavest light and life and peace: O hear us when we cry to Thee for those in peril on the sea."* The Hebrew word variously translated as "moving," "hovering," or "brooding" is used only twice in the entire Bible, the only other occurrence is Deuteronomy 32:11 ... there it refers to an eagle *hovering* over her nestlings ... you might say Mama Eagle here is *brooding* over her brood.

"Brood" is a multi-faceted word in English; it is used as a noun, a verb and an adjective. As a noun, it refers to the offspring of certain animals, or the children of one family (*Steve, Lydia, Hannah are my brood*). As a verb, it means to incubate, as in nesting, or as per the translation of Deut. 32:11 ... to protect and nurture the young by covering with the wings. Also as a verb, "brood" figuratively means the process of being deep in thought; meditating, as in "hatching" or nursing a thought. Interestingly, other words derived from the same English root are: *brew, broth, even ferment*. Like a parent brooding over his/her children, like Mama Eagle brooding over her nestlings, like a cook brooding over a pot of stew, like a brewer hovering over a vat of ale ... all these brooders have in common the aim of *bringing the object(s) of their brooding to full fruition and perfection*.

Finally, as an adjective, "brood" means "kept for breeding," as in a brood mare or a brood hen. I don't think we'll ever change the image of the Holy Spirit from a Dove to a Holy Hen, but the Holy Spirit *is* the Brooder of the Trinity. Here in Genesis He broods over the unformed chaos of all the raw elements of creation, bringing form and order and life out of the volatile chaos that existed, getting it all together. He brooded over all of it ... and you might say He "brood" it to perfection.

Genesis 1:2 tells us *"The earth was formless and void."* It's a little more poetic in the Hebrew; the original text says the earth was *"tohu bohu."* "Tohu" is translated as *"formless."* Interestingly, it can also be translated *"confused"* ... the English prefix "con" meaning "against"; "fused" or "fusion" meaning "coming together." Something that is CON-fused *isn't coming together* as it should; it is dis-jointed, falling apart. The earth was formless, because nothing was coming together ... it was con-fused, chaotic, volatile, unstable; **TOHU**. And BOHU -- the Hebrew *"Bohu"* is translated "void," but it is void in the sense of being *barren* ... unable to produce life; infertile. The earth was void, infertile, because it was too chaotic, too unstable, too con-fused for anything to take root and grow. All the "stuff" was there, all the elements needed for a beautiful creation, but it was disordered, unproductive.

UNTIL THE TRINITARIAN BROODER WENT TO WORK. The Spirit brought order out of the confusion, He worked to bring resolution and structure and beauty and life to the formless void. He helped put things together, and the universe took shape, so that it was no longer formless, no longer barren. The Spirit of God gave everything its place, and it brought forth life as color and brilliance and beauty all exploded into being! However, as we are told two chapters later in Genesis, this divine order was struck a blow. The entrance of human sin brought "tohu bohu" ... disorder, confusion ... back into creation. And human sin *always* causes things to go "tohu bohu" again. Life lived contrary to the will of God always starts coming apart; it becomes chaotic, unstable, barren, unproductive, even destructive. Sin puts things out of place, bringing disorder, and confusion into our lives.

God the Holy Spirit is still in business! He did not stop His ordering, beautifying work in creation. As we allow Him to work in our lives, **as we give God first priority**, as Bob McCook spent a career exhorting people to do, the Holy Spirit of God then comes and broods within us, working to restore order and beauty and proper priorities to our lives. He broods within us to help order our lives, to help us "get it all together," to give us integrity, to give us life, and life more abundant. He works to bring resolution, to give us integrity, to help our lives come together as they were designed to come together, so that our lives may have the harshness of discord removed and the tumult of chaos stilled. He works to make our lives beautiful in the fullest sense of that word!

As we come to God in humility, faith and obedience through the grace of Jesus Christ as led by the Holy Spirit, as we give honoring this Triune God first priority in our lives, the Trinitarian brooder broods within us, bringing about goodness, integrity, beauty and life ... life abundant and eternal ... in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.