

Preaching from St. Stephen's Pulpit

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, Williamsburg, VA June 12, 2022

Making Space

[Readings](#)

[Bulletin](#)

Sisters and brothers, my siblings in Christ; grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

What words of grace from Jesus this week! “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.”¹ Jesus knows that his disciples are already struggling with the teachings he has been sharing with them over the course of his ministry. And here, in this final discourse before John’s Passion narrative, he can tell that his attempts to prepare them for what was coming were falling on uncomprehending minds. The disciples can barely understand him when he says he must die and be raised, now they are grappling with the promise that the Holy Spirit will be with them when he has left them. So he gives them time, he gives them space.

Jesus routinely shows us the Way that he would have us follow. So when we see Jesus undertaking such gracious actions we should reflect on how we might follow in that same path. How can we best share the gracious gift of space and time? Here we are seeing the virtue of patience in the midst of anxiety being centered for the disciples, and for us. This is a highly important virtue for followers of the Way. One that is grounded in love for others. How might we provide safe and gracious space for those dealing with anxiety? How might we center patience even in the midst of urgent desires to offer solutions or help? How might we allow space for people to grow in understanding at their own pace? Patience...what a gracious, and difficult, gift.

What words of grace again as Jesus shares with those disciples, and with us, how “[the Spirit of truth] will guide” them (and us) “into all the truth.”² He promises them (and us) that we will not have to navigate the difficult waters ahead of us on our own. Instead, we will have a teacher, a guide, into the truth. And what is the truth if not Jesus³? What is the truth if not “grace upon

¹ John 16:12 (NRSV)

² John 16:13a (NRSV)

³ “I am the way, the truth, and the life” John 14:6a

grace”⁴? What is the truth if not “for God so loved the *cosmos*”⁵? What is the truth if not that we are made in the image of the Triune, and therefore relational, God?

In the course of his ministry Jesus repeatedly makes space for his disciples. Again and again in Scripture we see Jesus patiently explaining, teaching, and ministering to them; all the while giving them loving and gracious space to find their own way to follow. He never forces them on the Way...admittedly he can admonish and cajole, but that seems to mainly occur when the disciple’s recalcitrance is impeding the faith journey of others. Jesus encounters all sorts of others too that he makes space for, sometimes even literally as he did when welcoming the children into his presence⁶ (despite the disciples’ initial attempts at impeding them).

I am more and more convinced that this space-making is integral to any understanding of God, especially if we wish to blindly feel our way towards some limited knowledge of the Triune nature of God. Within the Godhead, within the Trinity, there seems to be an intimate, yet expansive space for us and for all of creation. After all, any attempt we make to explore the Trinity must be grounded in the Incarnation of the Word, the best self-expression of God’s interaction with creation, Jesus Christ. Julian of Norwich describes this thought far better than I can:

“The Trinity suddenly filled my heart with the greatest joy. And I understood that in heaven it will be like that for ever for those who come there. For the Trinity is God, God is the Trinity; the Trinity is our maker and protector, the Trinity is our dear friend for ever, our everlasting joy and bliss, through our Lord Jesus Christ. And this was shown in the first revelation, and in all of them; for it seems to me that where Jesus is spoken of, the Holy Trinity is to be understood.”⁷

Jesus cannot be separated from the Trinity, and while each “person” of the Trinity is different and unique, they are also wholly one and the same. So to learn about Jesus is to learn about the Trinity. Jesus is our best hope for some understanding of God. After all, as I stated earlier, Jesus is the self-

⁴ John 1:16a (NRSV)

⁵ John 3:16a (NRSV)

⁶ Matthew 19:13-15 (NRSV)

⁷ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, trans. Elizabeth Spearing (New York: Penguin Classics, 1998) 46.

expression of God's love, of grace upon grace, and of God's communal nature.

So Jesus, as the best self-expression of God, makes space for the disciples. He makes space for women and children. He makes space for tax collectors and lepers. He makes space for sinners and for the righteous. And he teaches us the Way, the Way of Christ, the Way to the Father, the Way the Spirit will guide us on, the Way of Truth.

This speaks volumes about the Trinity. God makes space for us. God makes room...for you! God shows us the Truth...God guides us in the Truth. And all of this is done out of gracious and loving acceptance. Why else would space be made for us, if not out of love? Children can try the patience of their parents, but healthy parents will always make space for their children. And that healthy parental love is one small expression of God's accepting and space-making love for us, children of God.

When I first started to reflect on the Gospel text for today I quickly had a hymn spring to mind. I wasn't sure at first why it jumped out at me, but as the week went on, and as this sermon came together, I realized it was because of one line in the hymn in particular. We are going to sing this hymn as our sending hymn, "Come Join the Dance of Trinity." And the line that has been bouncing around my brain and ringing in my ears is the second sentence of the first stanza. It goes like this, "The universe of space and time did not arise by chance, but as the Three, in love and hope, made room within their dance."⁸

I love the image conveyed in that line so much. The image of the Trinity being engaged in an eternal, divine, loving, hopeful, and creative dance is a beautiful one. And the thought that the Triune God, in all their majesty and might, would not only dance, but make room within the dance for creation...wow. The omnipotent, omniscient, source of life loves creation deeply enough to make room within itself for creation. The Triune God, creator of all that was, and is, and is to come; makes room for you. They love you that much! They love you enough to give you the room you need to grow in the Way of Truth. They love you enough to graciously accompany you...YOU...through your journey of life and faith. They love you enough to patiently make space for you to dance and grow and live in love. Amen.

⁸ Richard Leach, *Come Join the Dance of Trinity*, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, Hymnal, 2006, #412