Connections, a sermon for Trinity Sunday in response to Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Psalm 8; and John 16:12-15 by Rev Scot McCachren at the First Presbyterian Church of East Hampton, June 16, 2019.

Trinity Sunday… One Sunday of the year set aside for us to grapple with the Triune nature of God – The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – or Creator, Redeemer, and Friend:: each different yet all the same. Today’s the day to wrap our minds around something that is far beyond our comprehension:: the Holy Three in One – the Economy of the Separate Persons of the Same Godhead. +++ Otherwise known as the Sunday when the pastor tries to blow everyone’s mind with metaphors about the Trinity being like a tree, or an apple – ((the peel, the fruit, and the seeds are different and each has a different function, but they are all “”Apple””)) – all of that before finally conceding that it’s actually a mystery that we’ll never fully understand. +++ Yes – I’ve heard them all – +++ and I’ve preached a few of them myself. +++ +++ Preaching on Trinity Sunday reminds me of an old car commercial from 1988 where comedienne Jackie Mason tries to explain how 4-wheel steering works – “Did you hear about the new Honda Prelude with the 4-wheel steering? Nobody heard about it. You know why? :: Because they can’t believe it even when they hear it… As you turn the car in the front THIS way – and the wheels in the back are turning… in… ways that… nobody ever saw before. It has new directions for wheels to turn because you turn like this, the wheels turn like that,… the car goes like this… and all of a sudden… you’re going like that. You don’t know why – but it’s gettin’ you there in a way that you never did before. +++ And you know why you NEED this? … I don’t know.” +++ I remember the first time I saw that commercial. I had never heard of 4-wheel steering – yet somehow I think I knew less about it after the commercial than before it. +++ And that’s what it’s like to preach on Trinity Sunday – if you accept the challenge to explain the unexplainable.

But as we settle into today’s scripture readings, that’s not where they are leading us. Yes, we see all three Persons of the Trinity at work – interrelating with each other. And, we could pull them apart and say, “Look, that’s the Father doing this. And the Son is over there. And the Holy Spirit is pulling it all together for us – keeping us engaged with God.” +++ And, that would be true enough. That is all there… But our readings today tell us that God’s triune nature is not a closed system – not a way to understand God from a distance – as an other (or 3 others). Instead, we see the many-sided majesty of God reaching out to live in RELATIONSHIP – relationship among the Three Persons of God – and relationship with US. +++ God the Creator of the Universe, God the Redeemer who walked among us, and the ever-present God who is our Advocate and Friend – they do not just CONNECT with each other like some kind of members-only God Club – they each open God up to humanity in different ways – like the many petals of a flower that open up together and invite us in with sweet fragrance. As much as a way to understand the nature of God, the Trinity explores the many ways God’s love reaches out to make CONNECTIONS with US. It reminds us – that somehow – in the divine economy – in the being and expression of God in the universe – there’s a place for us – a resting place in the Lord, no matter what our needs are in the moment… The Living God is not Theology – not something to be explained and understood. The Triune God is to be experienced – and seeks RELATIONSHIP with us – seeks CONNECTIONS. +++ In her work on these lessons, Jill Duffield remembers the “variety of speeches [she has heard] at multiple events marking high school graduation,” a very timely connection to make this time of year. About an equal number of musings came from the graduates themselves and from school officials. Duffield notes “a marked difference between those of the soon-to-be-graduates and those of the officials. [Students] talked about the need for each other, the importance of honoring all people, the inevitability of challenges that will not be surmountable alone.” The adults, on the other hand, said ““Follow your passion, you have the power to do whatever you set your mind to doing.” Now, certainly, “such pep talks have their place, but the wisdom of the younger” generation is more striking. “They refuse to capitulate to the very American individualistic sentiment that all one needs in this world is one’s grit and wits and will. Despite their youth, they recognize, and know personally, circumstances and hardships that even clear eyes” and a determined spirit can’t overcome. “Instead, they offer a vision of communal care, corporate creating, mutuality and collaboration in all our joys and suffering.” +++ True life is life shared.
This resonates with Trinity Sunday and the relational character of God :: “even the Messiah did not do his ministry alone. He enlisted the least likely of people and commissioned them to continue his work of preaching, teaching and healing together” – working in community. +++ This intense CONNECTION,.. placing us in the mix with the Trinity,.. is the key to today’s gospel reading. Yes, the Holy Spirit declares everything about the Son – and the Son has everything from the Father… But it doesn’t end there – and that’s the main point. You see, somehow, this whole Community of God is coming together to invite us into it. In fact – keeping us in the community seems to be a primary focus. Why is the Holy Spirit going to come??: To guide us “into all the truth.” Why will the Holy Spirit glorify the Son?? :: To declare what is his to us! And what IS his that will be declared to us?? :: All that the Father has. +++

Our Proverb places a personified Lady Wisdom with God “before the beginning of the earth” – before Creation itself began. She was a “master worker” as the foundations of the world were laid down – which assures us of an orderly and good world, a world where we can rely on reason – and rely on God. Lady Wisdom is always in God’s presence – keeping things in order – and what is Wisdom’s delight??:: The human race. +++ So again, the full power of the God of Creation bends toward humanity – organizing the world with wisdom – ((a quality we share with God)) – +++ and delighting in us. We are reminded of the central role of humanity in both Creation narratives – and our distinction of sharing God’s image. We are CONNECTED to God at a primal level – it’s in our DNA – and draws us into relationship with the divine.

Today’s Psalm marvels at how the fullness of God – majestic, eternal, and all-powerful is mindful of human beings at all. And not only mindful:: the Psalmist writes, “you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet.” +++ Again, the scriptures announce that the rich tapestry that is our God – God the Creator Father – Redeemer Son – Advocate and Friend Holy Spirit – somehow invites us into the eternal mix; +++ sharing with us the CONNECTIONS so wisely valued by those high school graduates: communal care, corporate creating, mutuality and collaboration in all our joys and suffering. +++

And now – seeing how this free, generous, relationship with God is at the center of who we are – seeing how the full character of God is woven into our DNA :: the question becomes how well we reflect it. As individuals… as a congregation… as a community… do we reflect the generosity – the reaching out and inviting in – do we reflect the compassion of the One we worship – who dwells within us? +++ As the Eternal All-Powerful God, who has made us only a little less than that – … generously places us in a position of privilege in this universe – … and withholds nothing from us, +++: we must interrogate ourselves :: “Do we CONNECT ourselves in ways that resemble and honor the extravagant connection our Triune God makes with us?” ++++++ I wonder… Who outside of these walls would be most surprised if we – if YOU – reached out in genuine connection? Do our actions do enough to dispel the widespread belief that Christians focus more on judgment than love? +++ Our broken, divided, world – a world that seems to have lost its moral compass – where truth, generosity, and self-sacrifice are considered weakness – our world needs Trinity – it needs someone like you to share the hope,… the reconciliation,… the divine love that’s there waiting – longing – to be reconnected to it. +++ That’s the mission of the church – ourselves a CONNECTION of many, who together ARE the One Body of Christ.

+++++++ My friends, whatever theology you might settle on to define the Trinity, and whatever metaphors you might use to describe the nature of God – KNOW THIS:: Despite your flaws – (and we all have many of them) – the Creator God puts YOU at the center of Creation. +++The Redeemer God, Jesus Christ, came to Redeem YOU. +++ The Holy Spirit came for the specific purpose of walking by YOUR side as your leader, companion, and friend. +++ Whatever the Trinity is – however you might understand it –the fullness of God wraps around you – radiates exuberant and lavish grace upon you – and invites you in. And that… is GOOD NEWS!

+++++++ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.