

## **When the Spirit of Truth comes**

(sermon preached at Trinity Sunday 2007 by Teresa Morgan )

Our Old Testament reading this morning came from the Book of Proverbs, which begins with a father teaching his child about wisdom. 'Hear, my child, your father's instruction, and do not reject your mother's teaching.' The father is extremely moral and well-meaning, and just a bit dull. 'My child, if sinners approach you, do not be tempted... Save yourself from the loose woman... Dedicate your first fruits to the Lord, and then your barns will be filled.'

But as he speaks, Wisdom herself keeps breaking in, and she is anything but dull. She stands at the street corners, in the market square, at the city gates, and stretches out her hands, and calls people to listen: 'I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you.'

The father goes on lecturing his child. 'Do not plan harm to your neighbour; do not quarrel with anyone without cause. Do not envy the violent and do not choose their ways...' But Wisdom breaks in again: 'Listen, O people... my cry is to all that live... The Lord created me... before the beginning of the earth... Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth... When he established the heavens, I was there... When he marked out the foundations of the earth, I was beside him, like a master worker, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race.'

The song of Wisdom is the song of creation, the voice of God, and it speaks to our inmost being: 'Happy are those who keep my ways. Happy is the one who listens to me, watching at my gates, waiting by my doors. For whoever finds me finds life, and understanding of the Lord.'

On Trinity Sunday, we tend to talk about the Trinity as something unique to Christianity. God the father, the creator; God the son, through whom all things are made; God the spirit of life and truth. But when we look closely, the picture of the relationship between God and Wisdom in the book of Proverbs is not unlike that of the Trinity – with Wisdom playing the parts of both Christ and the Spirit.

Like Christ, at the beginning of St. John's gospel, Wisdom is God's firstborn and partner in creation. The way Wisdom calls us in the street, is like the way Jesus calls his disciples. Like Jesus, Wisdom says that whoever comes to me, comes to God, finds the way of truth and understanding, comes to life. Like Jesus, Wisdom tells us that she is building us a home in heaven, with bread and wine for us to feast on. And like the Holy Spirit, Wisdom comes as a gift from God, and becomes part of us, and brings us home to God. She reminds us that there is no division between God and us, or between person and person, or heaven and earth, or body and spirit. We are all one, all God's, all family.

The idea of the Trinity is saying something very similar to us. When we think of God as parent, we remember that everything comes from God, and comes back to God. In Christ,

God meets us in human form, so that our human understanding can recognize God and respond. In the Spirit, God becomes part of us, to remind us that we are part of God.

I started thinking about Trinity Sunday just over a week before it, when I was talking to a friend, and she said something that struck me very much. 'It's hard to believe,' she said. 'It sometimes is very hard to believe.' We were talking about different views of God in the Old and New Testaments, and about how a lot of traditional images of God don't make much sense nowadays. We know that the sky doesn't sit over the earth like a lid, and we can't lift it up and find God behind it. Hell doesn't lie under the earth nor heaven above it, like a cosmic block of flats. Very few of us imagine God as an old man hiding in the clouds, or riding on the wind. But we haven't really worked out a new picture of God, that chimes with our new understanding of the cosmos. I'm sure we will. These things take time to grow. But just now we're rather between myths.

And that makes it hard to know quite how to think about God, and sometimes that makes it harder to believe in God at all. But here, I think, the Trinity may help us. When Jesus calls to us in the street; when he stretches out his arms, and embraces us, and loves us into being more fully and wonderfully ourselves – that's God. When the Spirit breathes herself into us, and guides us to greater love and understanding – that's God. The mystery of the life that runs through each and all of us – that's God. Understanding it is not our top priority. Responding to it – living it – sharing it – those are much more important.

It's striking that in the Book of Proverbs, God's presence on earth is called Wisdom. Which sounds as if it's to do with thinking and understanding things. But Wisdom isn't like that at all. She's a power who calls us, to hear her – come to her – fall in love with her. She's a relationship. And she doesn't just speak to us. She sings; she's music.

And music is a relationship. When we hear it, travels through us and round us, makes the air dance around us, shimmers our atoms like a silk scarf in the wind. Music moves us, sweeps us off our feet and transforms us. We don't have to understand it at all to be affected by it or to join in with it.

That's what Wisdom is like, and that's what God is like. 'When the Spirit of Truth comes,' Jesus says to his disciples, 'he will guide you, into all the truth.' We don't have to understand what he is or how he works. We only have to be open to being approached by him, and answer when he calls.

On Trinity Sunday, we remind ourselves that God takes many forms. She may be in the market place, calling us to listen. He may be inside us, in our heartbeat, the music of our creation. We wait to feel the Spirit breathe in us and turn us towards God like a compass turning towards magnetic North. We hope to be swept off our feet and transformed by the power of love. Most of all, we pray that long before we come to understand God, we may express God – in everything we do and say and are.

Amen