

A Father's Character
Proverbs 8:1-11; Psalm 8; John 16:12-15; Romans 5:1-8
Salem United Methodist Church; June 16, 2019
Rev. Dr. Sue Shorb-Sterling

Today the church celebrates the Trinity: God in Three Persons: Creator Father, Redeemer Son, and Sustainer Spirit. And we are celebrating Father's Day, a day in which we honor all fathers. The preacher has to decide to preach on the Trinity or fathers. Or is it possible to preach on both? This preacher will attempt to preach on both.

Trinity Sunday is the only Sunday on the church calendar in which we honor a church doctrine and not an event in the life of Jesus. The word, Trinity, is not in the Bible. The concept of God being one in three persons took about three hundred years to develop. Jesus never uses the term, Trinity, but he does mention in John's Gospel that God is Father and that he and the Father would send the Spirit. The only mention of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together is in Matthew 28 where Jesus commissions his disciples to baptize all nations in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We still baptize with this formula today. The Apostles including Paul never mentions God in three persons. Church leaders in the second and third centuries struggled to define God. Were they worshipping one God? Or two Gods with Jesus being one of these Gods? Or were they worshipping three Gods: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? And how do these three relate to each other? In 325 C.E. (A.D.) the bishops of the Christian faith came together in Nicaea and formulated what we now call the Nicene Creed. This creed is the foundation for the doctrine of the Trinity. Each person of the Trinity is God working in perfect harmony with the other two and living in perfect community. The Trinity invites all creation including humanity to become at one with the oneness of the Trinity. The Trinity is a three-way partnership or a team of three. Each has specific roles, yet each works together for the same purpose. Together they have the same character.

So, what is the character of God? My father was a character. He loved to walk up to people who were totally unaware and pinch them on the back of their legs and then he would run away laughing. He also loved to walk up to family members, pinch their cheeks, and say, "You're a chubby little rascal!" His whole world was cars. My earliest memory of my Dad was him waxing his car at a family picnic while listening to NASCAR races on his transistor radio. Dad was a police officer in our small Pennsylvania town. On weekends he would find teenagers drag racing their cars on both sides of the highway. Instead of giving them a ticket or arresting them, he got permission to use the local air field as a drag racing track. Every weekend the teens would gather there to safely drag their hot rods. In addition, he taught these teens car maintenance and driver safety. We could say that the character of my father was a prankster who had a heart for the youth in our community. So how do we define the character of God?

Our scriptures give us some insights. Take out your scripture insert and look at the Proverb passage that talks about Wisdom. Many biblical scholars see wisdom as part of the character of God. How does the writer of Proverbs describe God's character in these verses? A giving Spirit that gives us these character traits: prudence which means to have good judgement in knowing what to say, and when to say it, intelligence, nobleness or having good morals, righteousness or knowing right from wrong, and truth. Wisdom tells us that these are more valuable than all the material wealth in the world. Not only are these descriptions of the character of God, but God offers these to us as well. The Giving Spirit of the Triune God extends the character of the community of the Trinity to all humanity. Now

turn to Psalm 8. How does the Psalmist reveal God's character? The character of God is depicted as creative, loving, and caring especially towards humanity as well as honoring humanity by allowing us to care for God's creation. The Psalmist wonders in the midst of everything that God has created why would God care so much about humanity. This is God's character, loving and caring. Now turn to the passage in John-a short passage. How does John describe the character of God in these verses? Again, the character of God is a giving Spirit that will guide us in truth. This echoes the Proverbs passage. What else is God giving to us? Everything! Here we see the Trinity in action. Jesus states, "Everything that the Father has is mine. That's why I said the Spirit takes what is mine and will proclaim it to you." Everything is the Father's, and the Son's, and the Spirit's. And they are willing to give everything to us, humanity.

And finally, the Roman's passage. How does this passage reveal the character of God? Again, we see a giving, creative Spirit. How does God give to us creatively in this passage? With God's creative wisdom, God says, "If you believe, you are mine. You are justified by faith. If you have faith, you're with me. And you are forgiven." Then God's generous character gives us peace. God also gives us access to God's grace which accepts us as we are, where we are, and when stuff happens in our daily lives. God gives us this grace not in the celestial heavens, but serves us grace with our daily coffee or as we drive to work. God is with us in the minutia of life giving us hope. The giving character of God shows up again and again every day as the Holy Spirit pours out God's love into our hearts! How? And here is one of the roles of Jesus in the work of the Trinity. Do you see how the Trinity shows up in this passage? God gives hope. The Holy Spirit gives love. And Jesus gives his life. Each has a role, yet they work together for the same purpose, to extend their character to humanity. Jesus' role was to die for us while we chose to reject God's character, while we chose not to receive God's generous gifts of prudence, intelligence, nobleness, righteousness, truth, creation, peace, love, and EVERYTHING! We reject God and God gives God's very life for us so that we might wake up to God's generous, self-giving Spirit and accept the invitation to become one with God and one with each other. That is Forgiveness with a capital F, part of God's self-giving character.

What is your character? As a father, as a mother, as a person? Does it reflect the character of God? Is your character wise? Is your character generous, giving of one's self to others? Is it creative? Finding creative ways to right wrongs? Is it prudent, knowing what to say and when to say it? Is it moral or noble, making sure that one does the right thing? Is it truthful to one's self and to others? Is it peaceful both within one's self and with others? Is it forgiving? Is it caring, loving, offering hope in the minutia of life?

When we choose to receive the character of God, a generous spirit marked with self-giving love, then we will not judge others for being different from ourselves and we will embrace each person as a beloved child of God. We will also embrace each creature as part of God's precious creation. When we choose to receive the character of God, we will no longer compete so others will lose, but we will strive to leave no one behind. When we choose to receive the character of God, we will no longer settle scores, but we will forgive to restore relationships as Jesus has restored our relationship with God through forgiveness. When we choose to receive the character of God, we will not seek personal privilege, but pursue justice for the despised, oppressed, and persecuted.

Jesus called God his Father and showed us God's character. The Holy Spirit pours God's character on us. Together the Triune God invites fathers, mothers, and all persons to live in unity with the community of the Trinity. This invitation never expires. We are always welcome to accept God's gracious offer of a Father's Character. Are you willing to accept it?

