



Sermon 15 June 2025 Trinity Sunday

John 16:12–15 [The New Revised Standard Version](#)

12 “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now . **13** When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. **14** He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. **15** All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Proverbs 8 New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

The Gifts of Wisdom

8 Does not wisdom call
and understanding raise her voice?
²On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
³beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:
⁴“To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all who live.

Wisdom’s Part in Creation

²² “The Lord created me at the beginning^[a] of his work,^[b]
the first of his acts of long ago.
²³ Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
²⁵ Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth,
²⁶ when he had not yet made earth and fields^[c]
or the world’s first bits of soil.
²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there;
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
²⁸ when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master worker,^[d]
and I was daily his^[e] delight,
playing before him always,
³¹ playing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.

*Loving trinitarian God/Divine Trinity, we gather in Your name,
and we invite Your Divine presence into this space. Bless our time
of worship and learning. In Your holy name, we pray. Amen.*

The Trinity is probably one of the most misunderstood Christian concepts both among Christians and people of other faiths trying to make sense of it.

My aim today is to confuse you even more because as

Jen Smith suggests in her wonderful book *Disruptive Inclusion: Why and How Christian Adult Learning is*

For Everyone:

‘Effective learning rarely feels good...the best kind of learning may need to feel a little uncomfortable or destabilizing to be effective.’

I will try to develop some threads of thought... and then later weave them – hopefully meaningfully -

together... so please bear with me... maybe a bit like the eternal weaving together of the threefold nature of the God we celebrate today.

Let’s look first at the recurring, common themes across both readings.

John’s _____ gospel: Jesus says:

“I still have many things to **say** to **you**, but **you** cannot bear them now. **COMMUNICATION/ RELATIONSHIP**

When **the Spirit of truth** comes, **he** ... will **not speak on his own**, but will speak whatever he **hears...**

He will glorify **me**, because **he** will take what is **mine** and declare it to **you**. All that the **Father** has is **mine**. For this reason, **I** said that **he** will take what is **mine** and declare it to **you**.

RELATIONSHIP/ COMMUNICATION/ IDENTITY

IDENTITY=the fact of being who or what a person or thing is

Proverbs: Does not wisdom **call** and understanding raise her **voice**? **COMMUNICATION**

To **you**, O **people**, I **call**, and my **cry** is to **all who live**.

COMMUNICATION/ RELATIONSHIP

²² “The Lord created me at the beginning^[a] of his work,^[b] the first of his acts of long ago...

³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master worker,^[d] and I was daily his^[e] delight,

playing before him always,

³¹ playing in his inhabited world

and delighting in the human race. **RELATIONSHIP/**

IDENTITY

COMMUNICATION-RELATIONSHIP-IDENTITY – let’s

park these three recurring themes for a moment...

The concept of the **Trinity**, Father-Son-and-Holy-Spirit, the three-in-one God, is a Christian Ideology if you like, developed over time; an **ideology is a set of beliefs characteristic of a social group (our Christian community) captured and expressed in language. So, ideology and language (& communication) are deeply interrelated.**

My beautiful friend Margaret who is a speech therapist by profession completed a few years ago - supported by our wonderful Father Michael Taylor - her PhD in theology where she applied the tool of **psycholinguistics** to theology.

The discipline of psycholinguistics explores how we understand the words we hear and see and how we construct a response in either spoken or written words. (Margaret's words)

She analysed how Christian **language** and **ideology** or belief, especially our language about the Divine, are interrelated. Words used in prayer and worship create and maintain belief or ideology – simply through the mechanisms of language processing which mostly happens subconsciously.

The words we use to and about others, including the Divine, will constitute us into **identities** and

relationships, thus influencing our behaviours through the social practices expressed by the ideologies expressed and maintained through those words.

(I hope you notice that I am talking here about **language, i.e. communication, relationship and identity**, the themes that I also identified in our two readings! Some intentional thread-weaving...)

Margaret looked especially at the language of the liturgy we use in the Church of England. And here is a significant psycholinguistic insight: even though the liturgical words for the Divine such as 'Father' are

metaphors (=a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable), over time through our frequent and automatic use, they have become literal understandings, i.e. perceived as direct descriptions of God.

So, Margaret's **psycholinguistic reading of the communion texts where God is overwhelmingly referred to as 'Father', 'he', 'him', 'his', 'Lord', gives us the ideology or the belief of an almighty, male, patriarchal God who demands obedience.**

My question: Is that biblical? And more so, is that who God really is, almighty, male, and patriarchal?

Do we do justice to the mystery of God if we only speak of God in those words?

Let us go back to our two readings for today and see what kind of God these biblical words suggest. The gospel reading is obviously being used today because it contains an early understanding of our Trinitarian God: we have [Jesus](#)(1) addressing us, and he mentions the [Spirit](#) of truth(2) and the [Father](#)(3), i.e.

[the three-in-one God](#). And the pronouns are all [masculine](#).

But then in Proverbs we have [female](#) pronoun use:

Does not [wisdom](#) call

and understanding raise [her](#) voice?

To you, O people, I call,

and my cry is to all who live.

“The Lord created me at the beginning^l of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago...”

Elizabeth A. Johnson, CSJ¹ a Roman Catholic nun, feminist theologian and Distinguished Professor Emerita of Theology at Fordham University, has written several amazing books, but the one I want to refer to today is called *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*.

There is so much I could share about her research and insight, but I will offer you some brief flavours here.

Proverbs speaks very explicitly about the mystery of God in the female symbol, the biblical figure of Wisdom. The term itself is of feminine grammatical

gender: *hokmah* in Hebrew, *Sophia* in Greek, *sapientia* in Latin. It is not only the grammatical gender that is feminine but the depiction of Wisdom throughout Hebrew Scriptures is consistently female, casting her as sister, mother, female beloved, chef and hostess, preacher, judge, liberator, establisher of justice, and a myriad of other female roles wherein she symbolizes transcendent power ordering and delighting in the world.

In today's verses she is a street preacher, a prophet who cries aloud in the market and at the city gates.

¹ a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Brentwood

After publicly raising her voice to demand attention to her words of truth, she slips into the first person singular form of speech to describe her own character, identity and works. Among other things Sophia states that she existed before the beginning of the world as the first of God's works.

Additionally, in the Jewish trajectory that developed after the close of the biblical canon, **the Spirit of God also came to be spoken of in the female symbol of the *shekinah***. *Shekinah* is derived from the Hebrew

word *shakhan*=to dwell -> God's dwelling among the people in feminine form.

Furthermore, what is also interesting, **the Hebrew word for spirit, *ruah*, is of grammatically feminine gender. The biblical Greek term for spirit, *pneuma*, is grammatically neuter, while the long-used Latin term, *spiritus*, is grammatically masculine** which may be one explanation why the Spirit later transmuted into a masculine form (despite the biblical translator and theologian Jerome asserting that these feminine, neuter and masculine linguistic variations

signified that God transcends all categories of gender and is indeed Spirit).

Let's go back to **Wisdom-Sophia** - her later **Christian trajectory is quite complex, influencing Christian pneumatology** (=teachings about the Holy Spirit), **Christology** (=teachings about Jesus) and **Mariology** (=teachings about Mary).

Sophia came to be associated with the Spirit -> **Spirit-Sophia** – the close affinity between *ruah* (Spirit in Hebrew of grammatically feminine gender) and

hokmah (Wisdom in Hebrew also of grammatically feminine gender), both symbols of God's energy involved in universal cosmic creation.

But Sophia also came to be associated with Jesus -> **Jesus-Sophia** - first-century Christians, in their attempt to express the saving significance of Jesus, gleaned the Jewish religious tradition and the surrounding Hellenistic culture for interpretive elements. Along with Son of God, Son of Man, Messiah, and Logos, the tradition of Jewish personified Wisdom was ready to hand.

Does Wisdom's description of herself not remind you of John chapter 1?

“The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.”

John: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning.’²

So, I hope I have confused you all enough...

² There is no surprise then that Jesus also came to be seen as Mother, such as for example in the High Middle Ages (1000-1300) as this book for example illustrates:

The point Margaret's research is trying to make is that we are so reluctant to change our **language** about God because **language** is so closely connected to our **relationships** with the Divine and each other and our own **identities** as human beings. There is strong resistance to changing the lopsided male image of God because of patriarchal power structures – we just have to consider all the wars in our world today in the context of patriarchal power structures... (and other factors...)

Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages: by [Caroline Walker Bynum](#)

Some of you might object now and say that Jesus left us the Our Father. And I would respond: **Even though Jesus left us the ‘Our Father’ prayer that has come to be known as the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus’ language about God is not monolithic and monochrome but diverse and colourful, as can be seen in the imaginative parables he wove.**

A woman searching for her lost money, a shepherd looking for his lost sheep, a baker woman kneading dough, the birth experience that delivers persons into new life, etc... these and many other human - and on occasion cosmic - instances are freely taken as

metaphors for divine mystery in addition to the good and loving things that (many but sadly not all!) fathers do...

Taken as a whole, the gospel tradition demonstrates variety and plurality in Jesus’ speech about God rather than the exclusive centrality of traditional speech about God as Father.

So, back to Trinity Sunday. For me, the most important aspect in this Three-in-one ideology is the three-but-all-contained-in-one, the we-in-one. One of the best descriptions of the Trinity is captured in the following

words: 'In the deepest mystery of [God's] being, God is an intimate relationship, a fellowship, a community of love' (Johnson, 2002, p.51).

American poet Rosemerry Wahtola's short poem called 'One Interconnectedness' really captures this:

(Just three words)

'because

you,

me'

Just consider for a moment how far we are removed from this deep truth in all the different conflicts in the world... in Israel-Palestine, Russia-Ukraine, and and and...

'because

you,

me'

... like Jesus saying because of me the Spirit of truth, and because of the Father me:

13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you in to all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears...All that the Father has is mine...

...these words really sound **like a relationship/relational dance...**



(Perichoresis is derived from the Greek

peri, "around" and choreō, "to go, or come", in theological terms, describes the mutual indwelling of the three persons of the Trinity within the one divine essence. It essentially means that each person is completely within the other two, while maintaining their distinct individuality.

²² “The Lord created me at the beginning^[a] of his work,^[b]
the first of his acts of long ago...

³⁰ then I was **beside** him [not under or above!], like a master
master worker,^[d]
and I was daily his^[e] delight,

playing before him always,
³¹ **playing** in his inhabited world
and **delighting** in the human race...

**...there is no dominance and power over others -
only playfulness and delight... Amen.**

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