The Feast of the Holy Trinity June 19, 2011

Drawing Our God-Pictures

a sermon by the Rev. Warren L. Pittman

texts: Genesis 1:1-2:4a, 2 Corinthians 13:11-13, Matthew 28:16-20

You've all heard the story of the kindergartener intensely focused on her art project, using all the crayons in the box to draw her picture.

The teacher bends over the child and asks, "What is it you're drawing?"

Without looking up, the little girl says, "God."

The teacher, forgetting everything he knew about child development and formation, like never tell a child that her drawing is “wrong,” replies, "But no one knows what God looks like."

And without a moment's hesitation, the child says, "They will when I’m finished!"

Today is the Feast of the Holy Trinity: the Sunday after the annual cycle of Gospel stories following Jesus' life concludes with the coming of the Holy Spirit, in which *we* try, with our words, to draw a picture of God.

A more "grown up" artist than the child in the familiar anecdote – wait! I take that back: she may be older, but I have no idea how "grown up" she is – Holly Meade, was recently quoted as saying, when asked about *her* drawing of the "Holy Trinity":

> "*Well, there is no comprehending the Holy Trinity. And picturing the Holy Trinity? That's not to be either. On the other hand, we've all been given imagination, and a sense of wonder and play. And so* (showing her picture to us, the rest of the class, we might say) *here they are, as colorful, holy personalities compelled forward on our behalf - lovely, watchful, tireless.*"
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> (Christian Century magazine, March 22, 2011 p. 55)

Were we worshipping in a state-of-the-art megachurch, complete with HD video screens, this is the moment in which I'd have the media team up in the control room project a child's drawing of "God" on the left-side-of-the-sanctuary screen, and Holly Meade's woodblock and linoleum print onto the right-side-of-the-sanctuary screen, and then ask you all to tell me which picture looks more like God.

And if you actually picked one, you'd flunk this class in Trinity 101!

No one can draw a picture ***of*** God: none of what you may have seen in stained-glass windows or on frescoes were ever meant to be pictures *of* God; but there are as many ways to draw pictures *about* God as there are sheets of paper, stretched canvasses, plaster walls, church ceilings, and faithful artists.

And nowhere in scripture do we read anything in the way of "word pictures" of God, either. There are no texts - at least between the covers of what we call The Bible – in which you will find descriptions of God. Even prophets like Ezekiel, or John the Revelator, who may sound at first as though they are trying to tell us what God looks like, do not "draw pictures" *of* God. Their verbal artwork is made up, like all such efforts, of words written to tell us *about* God.

So it is today that we listen to the opening words of the Christian Bible and the Hebrew *Torah,* words also held sacred among our Muslim sisters and brothers. We go back to the beginning, the *Genesis*, of it all, to hear how "*In the beginning, God*...."

God is creator ... of it all. Whether you take the rest of the Chapter we just heard literally, as many still do, or "mytho-poetically," which instead of diminishing its message, enhances the whole creation story for me, we stand to say together that all of what is, is first of all because God made it so. Things have gotten a little messed up along the way, but God created it all, and it is fundamentally good ... it's very good. (And that's the kind of "fundamentalism" I'll buy into!)

And this morning we listen as Matthew the Evangelist wraps up his version of the Jesus story, a story he tells because he, like a community in which he belongs, believes God is in that story.

He believes that in the words and actions of one *Yeshua bar Yusef,* the very same God who was "in the beginning" is embodied. And like others – a fellow named Mark, whose "Good News" Matthew seems to have read, and from which he borrows unhesitatingly; someone using the name Luke, who also helped himself (or herself, if you read a few interesting commentators!) to Mark's codex; and John, a poet/mystic most likely of the church's second generation – Matthew had come to the realization that the inexhaustible being of God had been made available to him, and to the rest of the world, in Jesus.

And so he wraps up his version of this "Good News" by having Jesus tell us that even though we may have missed the chance to see and hear his story first hand, he is still available, still present, and will be with us "always," in the telling and retelling of the story.

Matthew knows this, even though he himself most likely was not the "Matthew" named among the disciples, because he has fallen in with the church, and found a circle of people that has ***grace***fully welcomed him, among whom he has felt genuine and unconditional ***love***, and with whom he has come to feel himself in a ***communion*** that he can only describe as holy.

God is at the heart of the relationship he is in with those whom he knows now to be sisters and brothers, and when he hears them rereading a Letter that has been passed around churches of Greece, Asia Minor, Palestine, and Egypt for about twenty years in which the writer concludes by saying "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you...," he can say, "Amen! You got that right! It already is."

Nobody knows what God looks like, but I do hope that all of us can draw pictures, or tell stories that help others to make use of their God-given imagination to see the living, active Presence of God, in the beauty and life of the created world around us, in the rich life-giving stories of Jesus' life and words, and in the grace-full, loving, holy community the church aspires, and sometimes is able, when we let The Holy Spirit have her way with us, to be.

AMEN.