

Trinity Church in the City of Boston

The Rev. William W. Rich

June 16, 2019

Trinity Sunday, John 16:12-15

The Trinity in Poetry

Holy, holy, holy, Adonai, Jesus, Spirit,
All thy works shall praise thy name
In earth, and sky, and sea,
Holy, holy, holy, merciful, mysterious, mighty,
God in three persona, blessed Trinity.

Prologue

Everything worth anything comes in three parts.
A beginning, a middle, an end.
A thesis, an antithesis, a synthesis.
Dawn, noon, night.

And so it is with the One we dare to call God.
God: One in three.
Like a three act play. A one person play, with the author-actor
Playing three different roles, bound together inextricably.
Three different masks, three different persona. But one author. One actor.

Act One

Setting – Utter darkness. Like a black box theater. You cannot tell what time it is, or where you are.

The author-actor is dressed in a floor length gown. At first glance it seems white. But as she moves, with each gesture, the white breaks apart into all the colors of the rainbow, the full spectrum of light.

She comes downstage center. And sits, crosslegged, yoga like. The right foot is lifted and placed gracefully on the opposite knee. And so with the left foot. Lifted with grace. Lowered onto the right knee. She bows her head, and cups them in her hands.

As she opens her mouth to speak, up from the audience comes a black man, dressed in the garb of a roaring twenties stylish man from Harlem. His name is James Weldon Johnson. From her mouth comes his voice, but with a subtle change here and there. Every time the poet tries to voice a male pronoun, his voice gives way and we hear the author-actor's voice, a deep alto, say for the poet: she...herself...her.

And God stepped out on space,
And *she* looked around and said:
I'm lonely --
I'll make me a world.

And far as the eye of God could see
Darkness covered everything,
Blacker than a hundred midnights
Down in a cypress swamp.

Then God smiled,
And the light broke,
And the darkness rolled up on one side,
And the light stood shining on the other,
And God said: That's good!

Then God reached out and took the light in *her* hands,
And God rolled the light around in *her* hands

Until *she* made the sun;
And *she* set that sun a-blazing in the heavens.
And the light that was left from making the sun
God gathered it up in a shining ball
And flung it against the darkness,
Spangling the night with the moon and stars.
Then down between
The darkness and the light
She hurled the world;
And God said: That's good!

Then God *herself* stepped down --
And the sun was on *her* right hand,
And the moon was on *her* left;
The stars were clustered about *her* head,
And the earth was under *her* feet.
And God walked, and where *she* trod
Her footsteps hollowed the valleys out
And bulged the mountains up.

Then *she* stopped and looked and saw

That the earth was hot and barren.
So God stepped over to the edge of the world
And *she* spat out the seven seas --
She batted *her* eyes, and the lightnings flashed --
She clapped her hands, and the thunders rolled --
And the waters above the earth came down,
The cooling waters came down.

Then the green grass sprouted,
And the little red flowers blossomed,
The pine tree pointed his finger to the sky,
And the oak spread out his arms,
The lakes cuddled down in the hollows of the ground,
And the rivers ran down to the sea;
And God smiled again,
the rainbow appeared,
And curled itself around *her* shoulder.

Then God raised *her* arm and *she* waved *her* hand
Over the sea and over the land,
And *she* said: Bring forth! Bring forth!
And quicker than God could drop *her* hand,
Fishes and fowls
And beasts and birds
Swam the rivers and the seas,
Roamed the forests and the woods,
And split the air with their wings.
And God said: That's good!

Then God walked around,
And God looked around
On all that *she* had made.
She looked at *her* sun,
And *she* looked at *her* moon,
And *she* looked at *her* little stars;
She looked on *her* world
With all its living things,
And God said: I'm lonely still.

Then God sat down --
On the side of a hill where *she* could think;

By a deep, wide river *she* sat down;
With *her* head in *her* hands,
God thought and thought,
Till *she* thought: I'll make me a *woman*!

Up from the bed of the river
God scooped the clay;
And by the bank of the river
She kneeled *her* down;
And there the great God Almighty
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle of *her* hand;
This Great God,
Like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneeled down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till *she* shaped it in *her* own image;

Then into it *she* blew the breath of life,
And *woman* became a living soul.
Amen. Amen.

James Weldon Johnson, *God's Trombones*, The Creation
(gendered pronouns altered by WWR)

Entre'Acte

The stage is empty. It is as if the first act had never happened. No light. No color. Nothing.

But the audience has a sense that a long time has passed. A very long time.

Act Two

Setting – As the curtain rises, the darkness of the Entre'Acte continues. Suddenly, a single light, dim at first, then slowly brightening, illuminates the center of the stage. It reveals a single hill, sloping upward from the center of the stage towards the backdrop of sheer darkness at the back of the stage. There is a single gnarled and bare tree at the brow of the hill.

Two figures enter. One is carried on the shoulders of the other. As they come into the light at stage center, we can see that the One carrying the Other One is old, almost impossibly, unimaginably old. His face is so wrinkled that we cannot make out his features. He is bald, but

there are red splotches on his scalp, as if someone or something had pulled out all his hair. He is naked. His body is covered in dust and ashes.

The Other One, the One being carried, looks to be much younger. A young adult. Perhaps 30 years old. He too is naked. His skin is burned dark as if by a desert sun. His arms are preternaturally long, as if something has stretched and stretched and stretched them out, nearly pulled out of their sockets. And his hands are enormous. The Young One's arms are draped down across the Ancient One's shoulders, his huge hands falling onto that ancient chest, resting near the heart, at the center of the Old One's body.

Together, they open their mouths to speak, as if to speak simultaneously, or as if to sing in a harmonious duet. But just then, up from the audience comes a Welshman, dressed in worn-tweed, and wearing the collar of an Anglican priest. His name is R.S. Thomas. From his mouth comes his raspy voice, but with a startling change here and there. When the Ancient One speaks the poet's raspy voice gives way, and we hear a rumble so deep that it is as if thunder and tidal wave were joining into one voice. And when the Young One speaks, we hear the voice not of a thirty-year old, but of one much younger: a playful child.

And God held in his hand
A small globe. Look he said.
The son looked. Far off,
As through water, he saw
A scorched land of fierce
Colour. The light burned
There; crusted buildings
Cast their shadows: a bright
Serpent, A river
Uncoiled itself, radiant
With slime.

On a bare
Hill a bare tree saddened
The sky. many People
Held out their thin arms
To it, as though waiting
For a vanished April
To return to its crossed
Boughs. The son watched
Them. Let me go there, he said.

R.S. Thomas, *The Coming*

Entre'Acte

As the curtain slowly descends for the Entre'Acte, the Young One falls backwards from the Ancient One's shoulders onto the hill behind them. The Ancient One bends down, gathers the Young One into his arms, and carries him to the top of the hill, where he lays him at the foot of the bare tree.

Act Three

As the curtain rises for the Third and Final Act, the walls of the theatre fall away. The proscenium disappears, and the stage sinks to ground level. Pouring through the openings where the theatre's walls once stood comes "a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages." Each one from this incoming crowd takes the hand of an audience member, and they go in procession, circling around a table that descends from the sky, piled high with bread and fish, honeycomb and wine. And this procession grows into an ever-widening circle. Hovering over the table, gracefully circling it, is a dove the size of an eagle or larger, with feathers brilliantly colored like those of a peacock or parrot. Held firmly in the gentle dove's fierce eagle-beak is an enormous snake.

The crowd begins to sing, their song blending words from every language ever known, and underneath this song, like a cantus firmus, sounds a ceaseless Alleluia that seems to sing from the Eagle-Dove's beating wings. Their procession becomes a dance. Each pair in the dance, it now comes clear, is formed of former enemies, and those enemies now friends approach the altar, hand in hand. When they reach the altar, each feeds the other bread and fish, then honeycomb, and helps to drown the other's sorrows with sips of wine that issue in intoxicating joy.

No curtain falls. The song and the feast go on and on. Come join them. Bring an enemy. Join hands with one heretofore a stranger. See how the procession grows, and how the truth you could not bear now sings from your hearts.

Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia. Sings the Three. Sings the One. Everlastingly.

William W. Rich
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