

## **Prayer before preaching**

“An LGBTQ+ blessing” (James Pritchard, *Blessed Be God*)

Genderful God, bless us with your acceptance of who we are.

Bless us with the knowledge that we are known and loved by you, and that even when we do not love ourselves you will never stop loving us.

Bless us, she, he, ze, zir, they, them ... in the uniqueness of our being.

Remind us that we share in your creative diversity with which you bless the world.

It is wholly appropriate that Trinity Sunday occurs on the threshold of LGBTQAI+ Pride being celebrated, commemorated, and advocated during the month of June.

The mysterious entwinement of the “personhood” of God-in-three is much too difficult to understand.

As I read from Genesis 1 last week, the *Ruach of God* fluttered over the waters during the earliest moments of creation – an entity that is rendered as breath, wind and/or spirit. It is this same entity that fluttered upon Jesus as he came out from the waters of baptism. And this entity flowed out from the risen Christ when Jesus breathed upon the disciples on their way to becoming apostles. A gale-forced entity that was unleashed upon worshipers gathered for the Pentecost celebration in Jerusalem following Jesus’ departure from earth in bodily form.

Even unto this day, there is faith that this representative entity forms and shapes people who believe in the power of the resurrected Christ to carry on the beloved message of the gospel into the world.

Throughout Christian history, believers have sought to quantify the Trinity using the language of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. However as changes in language usage and biblical scholarship have occurred, we've seen some shifting around the trinitarian formula. Most notable is the change of the so-called third person of the Trinity. Most mainline Christians no longer refer to it as the "Holy Ghost" - instead we use the more recognized term, "Holy Spirit."

The main reason has to do with translating the Greek phrase "πνεῦμα ἅγιον" (*pneuma hagion*) into English. The word *hagion* is consistently translated as "Holy." But the other word *pneuma* is very similar to its Hebrew cousin *ruach* and can also mean "wind, breath, spirit." (Think pneumatic or pneumonia.) However, when the two earliest English translations came out – the Geneva Bible (1599) and the King James Version (1611) – they published the words spirit and ghost interchangeably. And as each of those translations spread into churches and households, the language took. The same can be said for the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds when they were translated into English. "Holy Ghost" became the phrase that stuck in the minds of faithful Christians as they memorized verses of scripture and the creeds.

However, by the turn of the 20th Century, English speakers had refined their understanding of the word for ghost, as how we understand it today: "an active, incorporeal remnant of a dead person." Eventually, that understanding did not sit well with followers of Christ, whose *living* Spirit guides our lives. Over the last

century, the language of the *pneuma hagion* has been accepted by more and more denominations and churches as the Holy Spirit. Dare I say most of us in this room have lived through this shift in language, and for the most part, it has been embraced.

I think this shift in the language about the Holy Spirit is helpful as we continue to be challenged about identifying God. Probably one of the most informative texts in the bible for me comes at the tail end of the first creation story in Genesis, when the Creator decides to make human beings. This creation story was written around 700 years before Jesus, while the people of Israel were in exile in Babylon. The priestly scribes wrote,

26 Then God said, “Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness...”

27 Humankind was created as God’s reflection,  
In the divine image God created them;  
male and female, God created them.

The text is echoed in the Psalm we heard today:

You have made us in your image / You fill us with your Love...

This rendering of the creation of humankind has continued to expand my understanding of two natures – the nature of God and the nature of human beings.

At this point in the life of the Jewish scribes, there was an understanding that all humans reflected God. Sometimes I need to keep things simple in my brain. It’s

like the attorney Denzel Washington played in the movie *Philadelphia*, who kept imploring witnesses to "explain it to me like I'm a four-year-old." If the understanding is that God made human beings in the image and likeness of God, and human beings are male and female, then I cannot in good faith say that God is only male. Now, it is not for me to tell any of you how to relate to God. However, I will invite you to grasp the understanding that none of us has the capacity to define God. And I am choosing to allow this story to help me expand my understanding of who God is.

The second thing I glean from this text, is the phrase that God made humankind "male and female." The world that most of us grew up in was color-coded blue for boys and pink for girls. All of the buildings we used for school, work and other public life had restrooms for males or for females. Our lives have been structured around the notion that each human being is one or the other. My readings of this Creation story in recent years break that notion - God made humankind male-and-female - each one of us male-and-female. Whatever makes a male or a female is contained in all of us. This is an extremely challenging notion for those of us who have grown accustomed to a binary world - one in which there is either this, or that, with nothing smearing those lines. But just as no book has been written that fully exhausts who GOD is, we are still discovering the complexities of what makes human beings who we are. And, actually, there is a book written about that 😊

I invite all of you to join us for the book discussion this Tuesday evening. The Peace and Justice Ministry is offering an opportunity to broaden our understanding as we explore together Lee Airton's *Gender: Your Guide: A*

*Gender-Friendly Primer on What to Know, What to Say, and What to Do in the New Gender Culture*. We come to this conversation from a variety of perspectives and experiences. Some are comfortable with the language and concepts surrounding gender, while others may be less familiar with them or have questions about why this language has emerged. Wherever you find yourself, you are welcome as we learn, listen, and engage together in a spirit of curiosity and respect.

If the 6th century scribes had it right, humankind is just as complicated and diverse as our maker. As we seek to grow closer to God, we are always asked to examine how we approach God and one another. Matthew closes the gospel with Jesus' exhortation to the disciples to "teach (all nations) to obey everything that I have commanded you." In a book I've been meaning to read, *The Commands of Christ: What It Really Means to Follow Jesus*, Tom Blackaby explores 125 specific commands of Jesus found throughout the Gospels.

I wonder if the disciples had a checklist of Jesus' commands as they made their way through the world? Probably not. But they were in luck - Jesus synthesized the commands for them, and for us. And you all know them well: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. And, you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

As one commentator put it,

Jesus's teaching aims to result in obedience. Jesus teaches to shape behavior, not simply to inform (see Matthew 5:19–20; 7:21, 24–27; 21:28–32; 23:2–3). This is made more explicit in this concluding scene, in verse 20, where Jesus's commission involves "teaching [all nations] to obey everything that I have commanded you."

Jesus's commands ... are situated in his words and deeds. They focus largely on showing mercy, especially to those most in need of it.

(emphasis added)

(<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/the-holy-trinity/commentary-on-matthew-2816-20-10>)

As we move into Pride month, I hope we can remember that of all the attributes of God the one we are called to cling to the most, is love.

I'm going to close with a song to which I was recently introduced. As I think about some of the expansive ideas of God, this helped me plumb even more expressions. It is called "They Are Mother," by Jennifer Lucy Cook. It is performed by the Utah Valley University Chamber Choir.

 They Are Mother by Jennifer Lucy Cook - UVU Chamber Choir

<https://youtu.be/-qHlTtY-vEs?si=KIhve4FwbkPp4MS>

(text below)

O Love, my Beloved, blessed be that you are. Amen.

Text - They Are Mother

What shall I call this force I know  
Who do I come to when I wonder  
The space that holds me when I'm low  
More than a parent, friend, or lover

They are Mover  
They are Maker  
They are Mother  
They are Mother

They are the breath I see in cold  
The ready muscle in the sprinter  
They are the glitter and the gold  
The steady heat lamp in the winter

They are Mover  
They are Maker  
They are Mother  
They are Mother

They nod and know  
They need nothing  
They're god and grow  
They bleed blessings

They are solitude  
They are multitude  
They are gratitude  
Gratitude

Laugh lines around the all-seeing eye  
And I can lean up into the sky  
Laugh lines around the all-seeing eye  
And I can lean up into the sky

What shall I call this force I know  
Who do I come to when I wonder

They are Mover  
They are Maker  
They are Mother  
They are Mother