

Psalm 8 ~ John 16:12-15

*There You Are*

Trinity Sunday ~ Ordination/Installation of Officers ~ June 12, 2022

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### *Introduction*

This week we buried two of our beloved FPC saints. On Monday morning, it was Charlotte Kruse, who was given 94 years on this earth before her victory day; then on Friday morning it was, Elaine Bookhart, who was given just 66 revolutions of the earth around the sun, before joining the heavenly chorus. The flowers here this morning, are a gift to us from Elaine's family. After their deaths and before their services, I was privileged to spend time in conversation with Charlotte's and with Elaine's families, hearing pieces of their loved one's life story, some of the amazing ups and downs, the twists and turns they each experienced on their life journeys. There were tears and laughter. There was the relationship that started with young RN Charlotte staying late to help a freshly minted doctor do his first spinal tap; and there was the relationship that began with a bet that Toney couldn't get any of those ladies at the next table to dance with him.

There was relationship and there was revelation. Yes, revelation of God's presence. God who is love; God whose very nature is relationship: God at work in us, through us, sometimes in spite of us. Sometimes it's hard to see. Often God seems distant, confusing or absent, hard to know or understand. One of the gifts of bereaved families in conversations like these, is the unique lens we are given to see God's presence threaded into our lives. Heavy hearts burdened by recent and sometimes traumatic loss, put us into a surreal space where, for a bit, our usual guard is down, and we are given glimpses and glimmers of Divine Light. Perhaps not seen before. Where is God?

The truth is, "God comes to us disguised as our life." This is a line that Richard Rohr learned from his friend Paula D'Arcy. He suggests that for most "religious" people, this is actually a disappointment. They seemingly would rather have church services... Here is the good news: Revelation is not something you measure, it is not something you get right or wrong, like on a test—but something or someone you meet! God is relationship.<sup>1</sup>

In our second scripture lesson from John 16, we will hear just a snippet toward the end of what is known as Jesus' "Farewell Discourse" that extends all the way from John 13 – 17. You might call this Jesus' family conversation with his disciples that he chooses to have just *before* he is about to die on the cross. Of course, his disciples are troubled and uncertain, they don't know what is about to happen. But they are sure they don't like it. "Don't go, Jesus. Not now. Not like this!" Can you imagine the knots in their stomachs? The headaches? The tears? But at the same time, Christ is assuring them, "You can do this. You've got this You *are* prepared for whatever is to come. You don't know everything, you never will—but you do know all you need to know, for now." Do we? I invite you to open your ears and hearts now, to receive these words from Jesus to you, today.

### Sermon

"Mr. and Mrs. Dursley, of number four Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much." So begins the very first Harry Potter Book, by J.K. Rowling. (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*.) "Perfectly normal." Isn't that what we all think we are, want to be, or wish we could get back to? You know before gas prices went through the roof, before the recent mass shootings in Uvalde and Buffalo, before the war in Ukraine, before January 6, 2021, before George Floyd's murder, before COVID, before climate change, before... The brilliant irony of that opening line written by J.K. Rowling is our commonly held, yet patently false notion about "normal." Friends, like it or not, just think about the very first primeval family, Adam, Eve, Cain & Abel, dysfunctional is normal. Speaking more broadly: our current cultural and political climate is certainly challenging and disheartening. But it is also "normal." And likely going to get worse before it gets better.

Now before I have completely depressed and discouraged us all, let me reintroduce Jesus, whom we also believe to have been here since the beginning, as the cosmic scale opening of John's gospel begins: "*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.*" (John 1:1-2) Shifting to the use of Light as a metaphor for Christ he declares: *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.* (John 1:5). Christ was there from the beginning AND God became human in a particular place and time, in a particular gender and culture, in dark-skinned Jesus of Nazareth. Theologian Walter Brueggemann has memorably called this "the scandal of particularity." But stay with me here. That is a fancy way of saying that God is not only out there, and everywhere and has been from the beginning of time, beyond knowing, beyond understanding. But God is also right here, too. Yes, the God of Moses, the "I AM WHO I AM" became one of us. And therefore we are who we are, offspring of I AM WHO I AM. From the burning bush to the Pentecost fire, we celebrated last week. God with us, God in us. The Spirit of Truth guiding us.

But how do we really hear God, know God, how do we come to Love as Jesus loves us? How often do we say out loud or to ourselves, "There you are!" I think more often we feel like Thomas said to Jesus in John 14:5: "Lord we *do not know* where you are going, how can we know the way?" To that question Jesus responded to Thomas: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." I wish we knew what Thomas said in response. That's not in the Bible. But I'm guessing he might have said (or thought,) "That's great, Jesus, but couldn't you just give me a map?" Here's the thing: Jesus gave us a relationship, not a map. As much as we like maps or GPS systems that take us from where we are to where we need to go, they don't always do that. Do they. We can go off the map, we can be using the wrong map. If we are depending on GPS, our phone can die or drop the cell signal. And then we are stuck. Even when our mapping device works perfectly, it can only take us to where we *thought* we wanted to go.

Let's be honest: who ever asks our GPS to lead us down the dark valley? Whether that is the valley of despair or death, desperation, or desolation. Not our chosen destination. And yet we find ourselves in that valley, anyway. The early twentieth century mystic Evelyn Underhill said once in one of her retreat talks: "*There is always a night-shift and sooner or later we are put on it.*" Friends, the night-shift is part of "normal." And as Evelyn Underhill said, we all are put on it,

sooner or later. Some of us may be in it right now. Anyone reeling in grief from the loss of a loved one is. Certainly, the people of Ukraine are in it. So are the 30 million refugees in the world right now. And so was Jesus. Yes, when our Creator of the Universe, chose to experience our limited human condition first hand, he walked that lonesome valley, as the African-American spiritual song so eloquently put it. The Light of the World chose to experience utter darkness. Darkness is part of normal.

But we are not in the dark alone. The Way, the Truth, and the Life holds our hand through it. Listen to Evelyn Underhill's advice of what do when we find ourselves on the night shift:

*"Keep quiet inwardly and let God act. Don't dash about trying to get out of the fog and do not be frightened. He is in it, and is working on your soul through it...Don't be worried—all is well. Lift up your hands in the dark sanctuary of your soul when you are tempted to wonder what is the good of it all, and praise the Lord...Yet from that apparent emptiness in that apparent darkness, the ceaseless pressure of the Heart of God sends out streams of Love, Joy and Peace Into the world."<sup>ii</sup>*

That's what Trinity Sunday is about. Celebrating our God who gives us what we need for now and forever. Not a map. Not complete knowledge. A relationship of Love, made known in how we learn to love one another, through our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. And so much more. All the words we ever come up with could not contain or encompass God. Here is the most important thing we need to know about God: God only and always loves. You won't find the word "Trinity" in the Bible. Early on in our faith, as folks experienced the Love of God made known through Christ, this was their best way of putting words. Describing the one we call Word, who is beyond words. Beyond knowing.

It might start for children from hearing over and over the Margaret Wise Brown's children's story, *Good Night Moon*, but already our four-year old granddaughter Izzy and her two-year-old cousin Zoey, love to look up in the sky and point at the moon. Even Lily, our 16-month-old who has only about two words so far, points to the moon excitedly and says, "that!" Seeing them do this brings to mind the Zen saying from the Buddha that goes something like this, "All instruction is but a finger pointing to the moon. Don't concentrate on the finger or you will miss all the heavenly glory." I would say for us here at church, our sacraments with water, bread, and wine; our ordinations and installations with vows and laying on of hands, our Services of Witness to the Resurrection, our committal services: they are all but a finger pointing to the moon. Or in our case, a finger pointing to God, our Sovereign, who points back and us and says, "Yes, you, right there: You're mine."

Friends, what I'm trying to say is this. However bad our "normal" may get, God has been with us and for us before the beginning of time, every day and every hour, through the day, and especially through the night. We don't need to know the whole plan or the exact picture. Likely, if we did, we could not bear it. The Spirit of Truth guides us bit by bit, through communion with each other to make the hard parts of "normal" more bearable, and the beautiful parts more spectacular. And through it all, God grows our spirits and heals the world. That's why we are a

church. That's what our new class of elders and deacons are vowing to lead us through right now, for a time such as this.

I will let the words written by the American poet, Maya Angelou, in her poem titled, "In and Out of Time" be the last words of my sermon today. And let this be our Triune God's love song to you this day:

*The sun has come, the mist has gone.  
We see in the distance our long way home.  
I was always yours to have.  
You were always mine.  
We have loved each other in and out of time.<sup>iii</sup>*

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<sup>i</sup>Richard Rohr, *Things Hidden: Scripture as Spirituality*, (St. Anthony Messenger Press: Cincinnati, OH, 2008), p.17.

<sup>ii</sup> Robin Wrigley Carr, "Darkness and Light in Evelyn Underhill," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care*, 2019, Vol. 12 (131-151).

<sup>iii</sup> <https://allpoetry.com/poem/8905901-In-and-Out-of-Time--Maya-Angelou-by-Suus-Angelus>