

Trinity Sunday, Year C  
June 12, 2022  
St. Charles Ave Presbyterian Church  
Rev. Sarah Chancellor-Watson  
John 16:12-15

### Knowing God

Now maybe because it's summer time and I'm feel nostalgic for those days spent at summer camp, particularly telling and sharing stories, But this morning I hope that you all might indulge me as I read you one of my favorite stories, a children's book called *Old Turtle*, written by Douglas Wood.

Once, long, long ago, yet somehow, not so very long, when all the animals, and rocks, and winds and waters, and trees, and birds, and fish, and all the beings of the world could speak... and understand one another... There began... AN ARGUMENT.

It began softly at first... Quiet as the first breeze who whispered, "He is a wind who is never still." Quiet as the stone that answered, "He is a great rock that never moves."

Gentle as the mountain that rumbled, "God is a snowy peak, high above the clouds."

And the fish in the ocean that answered, "God is a swimmer, in the dark blue depths of the sea."

"No," said the star, "God is a twinkling and a shining, far, far away." "No," replied the ant, "God is a sound and a small and a feeling, who is very, very close." "God," said the antelope, "is a runner, swift and free, who loves to leap and race with the wind."

"She is a great tree" murmured the willow, "a part of the world, always growing, and always giving." "You are wrong," argued the island, "God is separate and apart." "God is

like the shining sun, far above all things," said the blue sky. "No He is a river, who flows through the very heart of things," thundered the waterfall.

"She is a hunter," roared the lion. "God is gentle," chirped the robin. "He is powerful," growled the bear. And the argument grew louder, and louder, and LOUDER... until...  
STOP!

A new voice spoke. It rumbled loudly, like thunder, and it whispered softly, like butterfly sneezes. The voice seemed to come from... why it seemed to come from... Old Turtle!  
Now Old Turtle hardly ever said anything, and certainly never argued about things like God. But now Old Turtle began to speak.

"God is indeed deep," she said to the fish in the sea, "and much higher than high," she told the mountain. "He is swift and free as the wind, and still and solid as a great rock," she said the breeze and stones. "She is the life of the world," Turtle said to the willow, "always close by, yet beyond the furthest twinkling light," she told the ant and the star. "God is gentle and powerful. Above all things and within all things. God is all that we dream of, and all that we seek," said Old Turtle, "all that we come from and all that we can find."

" God IS."

Old Turtle had never said so much before. All the beings of the world were surprised, and became very quiet. But Old Turtle had more to say. "There will soon be a new family of beings in the world," she said, "and they will be strange and wonderful. They will be reminders of all that God is. They will come in many colors and shapes, with different faces and different ways of speaking. Their thoughts will soar to the stars, but their feet

will walk the earth. They will possess many powers. They will be strong, yet tender, a message of love from God to the earth, and a prayer from the earth back to God.”

And the people came.

But the people forgot. They forgot that they were a message of love, and a prayer from the earth. And they began to argue... about who knew God, and who did not; and where God was, and was not; and whether God was, or was not. And often the people misused their powers, and hurt one another. Or killed one another. And they hurt the earth.

Until finally even the forests began to die... and the rivers, and the oceans, and the plants and the animals, and the earth itself... Because the people could not remember who they were or where God was. Until one day there came a voice, like the growling of thunder; but as soft as butterfly sneezes.

Please, STOP.

The voice seemed to come from the mountain who rumbled, “Sometimes I see God swimming, in the dark blue depths of the sea.” And from the ocean who sighed, “He is often among the snow-capped peaks, reflecting the sun.” From the stone who said, “I sometimes feel her breath, as she blows by.” And from the breeze who whispered, “I feel his presence as I dance among the rocks.” And the star said, “God is very close;” and the island said, “His love touches everything.”

I'll leave the book right there for now, and come back to finish it here in a minute. But knowing what we know of human nature and human history, is it really so hard to imagine a time in life of creation where even the rocks and sun, the antelope and fish, the birds and the waterfalls argued about who God is and what God is like. It's an argument that seems as old as creation itself. Ever since we developed the intelligence to begin to comprehend ourselves and the world around us we have also been developing our sense and experience of some kind of Presence or Power great than ourselves, of the Divine, of God. Because also from the very beginning God has been revealing Godself. God desires to be known and to be in relationship with Creation. We like the beings in *Old Turtle*, put into words our unique experiences of God and then likewise we find out that these experiences are not the whole picture.

Over the centuries we have created religion and theology, doctrine, rituals, and traditions to help us understand, explain, and hold on to and wrap our minds around this experience of the Divine. One such doctrine that is central to us as Christians is what we call the Holy Trinity. Today we celebrate Trinity Sunday, and if that is news to you, don't worry I wouldn't exactly call this Sunday one of the high holy days of church calendar. We glean our understanding of the Trinity from the whole of the witness of scripture. There is no chapter and verse that lays out neatly the Trinitarian formula – of the 1 God in 3 Persons. Today's text from John, does give us a glimpse into the interconnected nature of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, and how they work together to guide the followers of Jesus into greater understanding of the truth.

Our lesson comes from the part of John known as the "farewell discourse." We know, and Jesus knows, that it's his last night on earth before his gruesome death and then ultimate

resurrection. Jesus is trying to explain to the disciples what's about to happen – they don't get it of course. In their time with Jesus the disciples have had a very real experience of who God is in Jesus Christ, but what happens when he is no longer with them? Jesus is trying to prepare them for life without him, as he's also trying to tell them that they will never be truly without him. The Holy Spirit will come and will continue to guide them in the same ways Jesus did. Jesus will again be with them through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus knows what he is telling his disciples it's a lot to take in as he says, "you can't handle it all now," and it's true we can't fully know and understand God now, but what Jesus promises in the Spirit of truth is that we will grow in our knowledge and understanding. In John's gospel to glorify God is to make visible the presence of God, and in countless ways – as Creator, Liberator, Teacher, Healer, Guide, Comforter – that is exactly what the Trinity does.

As Presbyterians we are part of what is known as a "creedal tradition," meaning we use creeds, statements of faith, confessions from the Church throughout the ages to guide and enhance our understand of God and who we as the Body of Christ. We have as part of our church's constitution *The Book of Confessions* which guides our church's theology, doctrine, and beliefs. Now, unlike *Old Turtle* I wouldn't necessarily recommend *the Book of Confessions* for story time, but it may be just as effective at getting your kids to fall asleep at night. Today the affirmation of faith that we will be using is from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Helvetic Confession written in 1561. You may notice that there quite a few adjectives crammed in here to describe the Trinity, as these early Swiss-German Reformers take a stab at putting into words the mystery of the Trinity. These confessions and creeds detail our experience of God in the past, they inform us now, and give us hope for God's continual presence and guidance into the future. Even with all

our creeds, our confessions, our statements of faith – none of them fully captures who God is, but even so there is something of God that is knowable. So what about you in your own life, how has God made Godself known to you – as Creator and Divine Parent, as Jesus the Son, as Spirit, Advocate and Comforter? Because the Trinity is ultimately not a doctrine – it’s an experience. Knowing God is not about getting the facts straight or having the perfectly right belief – knowing God is about a relationship, it’s about seeing and being seen.

The lesson of *Old Turtle* serves as a mirror and a warning of what happens when we try to possess God, when we cling too tightly to what we think know of God, and turn our backs on one another and creation. But truly knowing God, remembering who we are as God’s creation, leads us to a better knowing ourselves – our purpose, our place in this world, our relationships with our neighbors. We don’t get there on our own. The guidance of the Holy Spirit brings us into greater knowing of God and reveals to us the truth of who we are and our place in God’s transformation and reconciliation of the world – we are a message of love and prayer from the earth.

*Old Turtle* ends with these hopeful words that I will lift up as a prayer for us...

And after a long, lonesome and scary time... the people listened, and began to hear...

And to see God in one another...and in the beauty of the all the Earth. And Old Turtle smiled. And so did God.