

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31 ~ Romans 5:1-5

*Sharing the Glory of God*

May 30, 2021 ~ Trinity Sunday ~ Graduation Sunday ~ Memorial Day Weekend

The Rev. Dr. Laurie Brubaker Davis

*Introduction to Scripture:*

Graduating seniors, if you were to describe your senior year in one word, what would that be? “Underwhelming”... “Limbo”... “Enlightening.” Those were three of the words that graduating seniors came up with in a recent interview. Whatever word comes to your mind, I’m pretty sure you are feeling done with school, at least for the summer. And the very last thing you want to hear is more instruction, more advice from your parents, your teachers, or your pastor. You are ready to fly the coop, launch out and start to apply all that hard earned knowledge. Or at least get outside and play, let loose a little. Or a lot. Come on, we’ve been in pandemic mode since the middle of your junior year.

I get that. But did you hear what Lady Wisdom was actually crying out with her raised voice? Her call, her instruction to all that live is not what you would expect. She is calling us to recognize and realize how everyone’s part, every created thing, is a part of God’s interconnected, interwoven, interdependent creation. Lady wisdom, who is a personification of God, is calling us out. She is saying in so many words: that we were not created for to be divided and competitive with one another, rather getting in step with God is a call toward forgiveness, trust, and wholeness. Why? Like it or not, we are in this together. But that is not all. The way forward is not to put our heads down, grind it out, and try harder.

Here’s the good news that I hope you will take with you today: Our Triune God, Our God who created, redeems, and sustains us is inviting us to play! That’s right. In this Proverbs text: work and play merge into one joyful response to God. We hear in this poetry that from the very beginning of creation, delight and play were God’s intention. Play is front and center on God’s palette and is therefore our proper response to God. The wise woman says in so many words, “Let’s play.” Don’t worry parents of teenagers about to go off to the land of college and unsupervised partying: this holy invitation to play, is not a free pass to skip class and party whenever possible. I can hear it now, “But mom, Pastor Laurie said I was supposed to play!”

Time to add our second scripture lesson into the mix: a snippet from Paul’s letter to the Romans, speaks to the depths and the heights of the real time play-by-play we are given through Christ. Let’s listen for what that is, as I read Romans 5:1-5.

*Sermon:*

“**God is love.**” There’s your Trinity Sermon for today. Did you miss it? I will say it again. Those three words say it all: God is love. (1 John 4:16b) Amen. May I should leave it there. But you know I won’t. I will invite you to say it, right now to say it with me: “God is love.” And here’s the rest the rest of that verse: “and those who abide in love, abide in God, and God abides in them.” Yes, our God of all creation, including you and me, is utterly relational and totally interactive. What is one thing we know about relationships? They keep changing. They are never

static, never the same. They are dynamic and unfolding. Anyone with a sense of soul, as Richard Rohr puts it, knows this to be true: God is never static within us. Rather, “Our theological understanding of the Trinity reveals God as a divine dance.”<sup>i</sup>

I am really going to date myself now with the story of my two sweaty palms, and two pinched feet, shoe horned into black shiny patent-leather buckled shoes, as I approached my first dance in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Actually, it was at a social dance class. Yes, they actually had classes back when I was a teen to teach you what to do and how to dance at a school dance or prom. First, they put us in hard wooden chairs, lined up so we would automatically have a partner to dance with. That was awkward enough right there. But then at the end of the class would be the chance for us to practice choosing partners: that was the worst, the awful free-for-all when you wait and hope you won't be the last to be picked. Being the 1960's, the girls were not the ones who were supposed to be doing the asking. I hated it because most of these kids all went to private schools and since I went to the public school, they didn't know me. Well, that was what my mom told me anyway, when I felt so rejected and unpopular always being the last or next to last person to be picked, while everyone else was already dancing.

Good news: The divine dance of God is *nothing* like this at all. Lady Wisdom in Proverbs 8 and Paul's letter in Romans 5 point to the One who chooses us every day, with every breath we take. God is love and delights in us. All of us. Chips off the divine block. Our God, who is neither male nor female, our Triune God who is Love, cannot be fully explained or understood by any name we conjure up. We really can only speak of God in metaphors. The more the better. Our Triune God is non-binary, and bursts every boundary we may try to try to draw. Lady Wisdom, a personification of God, tells us straight up: God delights in the whole human race. Each one of us made in God's image. You might call it our Pixie dust, or our X-factor, “our Very Special Personal Quality.” But here we call it God's glory within you. It's extraordinary because your X-factor, which here in church (rather than on Tinder or Bumble) can also stand for your Christ factor (X is an abbreviation for Christ). Everyone has the X factor, but no one but you, has your God-given X factor.

We were each given our X-factor, our share of the glory of God at our birth. Our share is unique and weird, we all have our quirks. Nor is our unique share static. Like the One who made us, our share of God's glory grows and changes and evolves throughout all our days that we are given to live on this earth: from our first cry as we emerge wet and startled from the womb, to the very last breath we draw into our lungs, as we transition from this life to the next. We experience the holy, we access the divine, (as Paul put it) not by trying to be perfect. Not by trying to fill someone else's expectations about what we should do or become. We transmit, we charge up, we magnify the glory of God by letting the divine dance point the way. Every day, let come what may. In all the changes, the moods, the laughter and tears, the blahs and the pain. Yes, suffering is part of the dance, too, as Paul points out. As the life of Christ teaches us.

Martin Buber tells the story of the great Hasidic Rabbi Zusya (Rabbi Zusya of Hanipol). On his deathbed he began to cry uncontrollably and his students and disciples tried hard to comfort him. They asked him, “Rabbi, why do you weep? You are almost as wise as Moses, you are

almost as hospitable as Abraham, and surely heaven will judge you favourably.” Zusya answered them: “It is true. When I get to heaven, I won’t worry so much if God asks me, ‘Zusya, why were you not more like Abraham?’ or ‘Zusya, why were you not more like Moses?’ I know I would be able to answer these questions... But what will I say when God asks me, ‘Zusya, why were you not more like Zusya?’”<sup>ii</sup>

God created you to be you. I wonder what kept Zusya from being Zusya? What holds *us* back from being more fully ourselves? A Facebook posting a couple of years ago drew a lot of attention. The quote read, “Sometimes the fear won’t go away, so you just have to do it afraid.” And that was before the pandemic. We all know what fear feels like, how it can lock us down. And how it can make us either shut down, or act up: neither of which does us or the world any good. In fact, it does the opposite. Don’t let fear shut down your X factor. If instead you do the dance of identifying, confronting and exploring your fears, wow! This is a spiritual practice that will yield surprising and amazing results. Even if it scares you half to death: do the right thing. Even if it is a new thing for you. It could be our God, who is never static, working within you. “Doing it, afraid” will grow your spirit and will spread the glory of God into your life and corner of the world.

Did you know that the phrase “Fear not” appears 365 times in our Bible? One “Fear not” for every day in the year. We need that reminder. Fear not, we are told over and over, because God is with you. God who is love, will never let you go. Even and especially when you are in pain or suffering. The One who suffered and died for us, was then raised for us, by our God who is Love. Not only early on the Third Day, as our story goes. But every day. That’s part of the power and the meaning of Christ’s resurrection. As Christians, yes, we believe Christ was raised from the dead one day long ago. But that event is not only a one-off, static data point. The resurrection is a daily dance. A daily stance. That specific hope, as Paul put it, that does not disappoint. It is Christ who gives us a life and a love that are cumulative, growing, and going somewhere that is *always new* and *always more*, to quote a phrase from Richard Rohr.

Nineteenth Century poet Emily Dickinson, paints an apt picture of what I am calling the dance of our Triune God, the dance of faith in her poem, “The World is not Conclusion.” The poem is a description of a laughing young girl, who she helpfully names “Faith.” The poem begins with the line, “

*This World is not conclusion.  
A Species stands beyond –  
Invisible, as Music –  
but positive as Sound –  
It beckons, and it baffles...*

Then midway in this poem comes the six-word line that compresses, I think the way we best share the glory of God. It goes like this:

*Faith slips - and laughs, and rallies- (Fr373)*

As author Robert Leigh Davis (yes, aka my husband) has written in his book, *Playful Wisdom: Reimagining the Sacred in American Literature, from Walden to Gilead*, “She laughs at her mistakes, recovers after loss, and lifts her blushing face to the presented opportunities of an

ever-changing world. Faith (as the laughing child) accepts this insecurity and models the agility we'll need to practice a different and more playful religion... It doesn't look like she's trying to "gain" anything, instead the ability to "slip and rally." Isn't this a relief? That's the dance to which we are all invited. Yes, we all slip. Bob continues, "Comfortable in her weakness, Faith knows that she doesn't know... To be in covenant relationship with the sacred, to be quickened by it, requires a shifting stance of perpetual adjustment, one that's never settled, never really in control, like skating on thin ice."<sup>iii</sup>

I will close with a story about Father Boyle and a man named "Grumpy," where we see a faith that slips and laughs and rallies and truly shares the glory of God. I see in this story a moment that can teach us all a holy dance move we can take with us today. Not the "Walz" or the "Lindy" that I learned in my 7<sup>th</sup> grade social dance class, but a beautiful turn in what I am calling the "divine dance." Here's the story: Father Gregory Boyle worked for over thirty years with the gangs of South-Central Los Angeles. He founded Home-Boy Industries—to create jobs and hope for those who were trapped in the inner city. Father Boyle got diagnosed with leukemia a few years ago, and he observed the wonder of having gang members, come visit him at the hospital. One of them was "Grumpy," a huge guy with "no neck and a ton of tattoos." Grumpy was the one they all feared. Grumpy got whatever Grumpy wanted. One afternoon, Grumpy appeared—just like that—at Father Boyle's bedside. He looked straight into the eyes of Father Boyle and said, "What do I have... that you need?"<sup>iv</sup>

Is there a better question to open the way to sharing the glory? The glory of God in Grumpy that could heal and bless Father Boyle in that moment. We know that Jesus went where people were hurting. In Matthew 25, Jesus taught us that he is not only with, but within the ones who are hungry and thirsty, the least, the last, the looked over. They too have God's glory to share with us. They have stories and wisdom we need to hear. And sometimes, we are the ones who are hungry for food, for protection—hungry for being told that we are alright the way we are and that we matter. Let's remember my three-word version of this Trinity Sunday sermon: **God is love.** And let's listen for God's call to play and to dance, the divine dance of life, as only you can do. To God be the glory: In us and through us. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Richard Rohr, "Introducing, Evolutionary Thinking," *Oneing*, vol 4., no. 2 (CAC Publishing: 2015), 13-14.

<sup>ii</sup><https://rabbisylviarothschild.com/tag/why-were-you-not-zusya/>

<sup>iii</sup>Robert Leigh Davis, *Playful Wisdom: Reimagining the Sacred in American Literature, from Walden to Gilead*, (Lexington Books imprint of Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham, Maryland, 2020), pp. 99 & 101.

<sup>iv</sup> NPR, "Driveway Moments" Podcast, September 7, 2006, p.17, as quoted by Mark Ramsey, "Sit and Get or Contend and Save—The Opportunity for the Church Now," *Journal for Preachers*, (Volume XLIV Number 4, Pentecost 2021), p. 17.