

**New St. James Presbyterian Church, London, Ontario**  
**Sunday, April 22, 2016**  
**Rev. Andrew Reid**  
**Proverbs 8:22-31; Psalm 8; John 16:12-15**  
**“Things that are to come”**

Today is Trinity Sunday, the Sunday of the three persons of the Godhead - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Or, for those who prefer non-gender-specific language: the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sustainer. Wherever possible, I try to use non-gender-specific language for God, but I can't help feeling that talking about Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer sacrifices a sense of personality on the altar of political correctness.

We tend to like things in threes in the church. We like three verse hymns (four at a stretch), and three Scripture readings. We like sermons with no more than three points, and we definitely like services that last less than three hours – preferably much less than three hours. There are the three elements which express the presence of the risen Christ through the sacraments: water, bread and wine. And as St Paul said, there are three things that remain: faith, hope and love. And three texts are before us today.

Psalm 8 is a hymn of praise and wonder. In it, the Psalmist ponders the mystery of human existence, especially the place that the human race occupies in the natural realm. The fact is that the Psalmist was just expressing the kind of thought that has come into the mind of anyone who, at some point or another, has looked up into the night sky. Whether it was from a remote spot, far from the artificial light of the city, or from a city during a power-cut or blackout, who hasn't felt that sense of the smallness of humanity in the vastness of space? Who hasn't asked, '*What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?*' Psalm 8:4.

But the Psalmist doesn't leave it there. He moves on into an even greater sense of wonder. *What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour.* Psalm 8:4-5.

The King James Version talks about humanity being *a little lower than the angels*. The New Revised Standard Version is a more accurate translation, and actually places the human race in an even higher position in God's scheme of things – *a little lower than God*. The Psalmist starts out apparently heading towards focussing on the smallness of the human race, but ends up being blown away by the God-given high status of the human race.

But the emphasis is on the *God-given* status of the human race. Even as he rejoices in humanity's dominion over the works of God's hands, with all things – sheep and oxen, beasts of the field, birds of the air, fish of the sea – under humanity's feet in verses 6-8, the Psalmist acknowledges in humility that it was God who made it so: *You have given them dominion ... you have put all things under their feet ...*

And because God has made it so, the Psalm ends as it begins, book-ended by doxology, a song of praise to God: *O LORD, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

The book of Proverbs, sadly, in my opinion, doesn't appear often enough in the Revised Common

Lectionary. It appears today, one of only two times it appears in this cycle of the Lectionary. And the Proverbs text for today has much in common with the Psalm text. It deals with big issues, matters that are part of the very fabric of God's creation and of life in God's scheme of things.

The voice here is not the voice of a human being, as it is in the Psalm, but the voice of something that is part of God's scheme. It is the voice of no less than one of the attributes of God: Wisdom. Wisdom claims to be the first created thing. *The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago ... at the first, before the beginning of the earth* Proverbs 8:22-23.

And Wisdom goes on to list all the things that were created after Wisdom – depths, springs of water, mountains, hills, earth, fields, bits of soil, the heavens, the deep, the skies, the sea, even the foundations of the earth. As God was creating all these, *I was beside him, like a master worker; and I was daily his delight ...* Proverbs 8:30.

Interestingly, throughout the book of Proverbs, Wisdom is presented as female. It starts in Proverbs 1:20-21: *Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice. At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks ...*

Again and again throughout the book of Proverbs, Wisdom is presented as the good woman, in contrast to the loose woman, the strange woman, the alien woman, even the tempting adulteress. All the merits of Wisdom, indeed, one of the attributes of God, are embodied in Lady Wisdom, who was to be found *rejoicing before (God) always, rejoicing in (God's) inhabited world and delighting in the human race* Proverbs 8:30-31.

Delighting in the human race – Lady Wisdom and the Psalmist both.

Biblical scholars have found, and even those of us who are not Biblical scholars may find, clear parallels between the Wisdom who speaks in Proverbs, and the Spirit of truth of whom Jesus speaks in the Gospel text for today.

John 16:13: *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears.* God's Spirit of truth will guide God's people into all the truth, the truth that the Spirit has been given from God.

And the Spirit of truth *will declare to you the things that are to come.* These things that are to come are too great for even the disciples of Jesus to hear from him, even though he is the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. These things only the Spirit of truth can teach.

The Psalmist wrote about the present status of God's human creature in the created realm. Lady Wisdom spoke of her status as part of God's creative process. It is the Spirit of truth who leads God's people into the future that God has planned for God's people, as individuals and as communities of faith.

What things does God have planned for you? for me? for us? Who can say? Well, the Spirit of truth can say. The Spirit of truth will say. But if we have –if we seek – the Wisdom that we see in Proverbs, and the perspective that we see in Psalm 8, then who knows where God may lead?