

Many Things are True, June 15, 2025

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 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, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”



I am exhausted this morning, and I apologize if I'm showing it. It's because I've spent way too much of my "free" time this week engrossed in the finer points of federal career and technical education Perkins planning, allowable funds, academic improvement plans, and the Vermont Agency of Education's Grant Management System, a glitchy and archaic computer system which responds to any slight error by deleting your data, and requiring a complete restart. I knew this time might come...the final push toward freedom from a previous career that

just won't completely let go...but didn't expect it to all be wrapped into one marathon week. When I left education, I agreed to remain on my school's payroll, on a very part-time, as needed basis, to help ensure a smooth transition to my successor, who needed to start after the school year ended. It was the least I could do for a school that kindly and graciously worked with me on a plan to be able to leave mid-year in pursuit of the call to serve this community. Are you excited about this, a friend and colleague asked? My response was yes, definitely, although I couldn't shake the feeling that I was leaving the school in a tough place.

You are, was her response. You absolutely are, and it's clear that it's the right thing for you. Two things can be true at the same time, even when they're in opposition to each other.

Two things can be true at the same time. I don't think there's anything that makes that more clear than today's beautiful yet chilling first reading, in which Maya Angelou makes clear the human capacity for both strong, incapacitating violence as well as revolutionary, profound tenderness. *We, this people, on this minuscule and kithless globe
Who reach daily for the bomb, the blade and the dagger
Yet who petition in the dark for tokens of peace*

We are the same people. The darkness and light exists within us all. Sure, some are more predisposed to violence, others to peace, but at the end of the day, we are united in our humanity, which provides solidarity, but also a warning of our own destructive power. Don't forget that Palm Sunday crowd, letting their hosannas turn to jeers in a few short days. Those jeers were our faults, in need of a redeemer. We were there when they nailed him to the cross...we were there.

Walt Whitman said: *Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes.)* Embracing our own human complexity is key to understanding how we can be made in the image of a triune God, each part separate yet united. Trinity Sunday is frequently called “the Preacher’s Nightmare”, due to the complex nature of trying to find not only truth, but relevance in a short sermon about this incredibly challenging notion of a father, a son, and a holy spirit. Certainly, there’s lots of room for debate. In the centuries after the writing of the New Testament, different answers were given to explain the relationship between the three people. The Western church held that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, while the Eastern church insisted that the Spirit proceeds from the Father only. The Western version seeks to make clear that the Son gives the Spirit to the church. The Eastern version, in order to make clear that there is but one God, insists that both the Son and the Spirit issue from God the Father, but in different ways. The Father begets the Son, but the Spirit proceeds from the Father. Early commentators dug way into this, with Augustine, in the year 407, preaching this perspective supporting the Eastern view:

is the Father only who is not of another. For the Son is born of the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. But the Father is neither born of, nor proceeds from another. And yet this should not occasion in human thought any idea of disparity in the supreme Trinity. For the Son is equal to him of whom he is born just as the Holy Spirit is equal to him from whom he proceeds.,

While I’m sure I’ll have plenty of spirited discussions on this in Seminary, thankfully, in this moment, the late Presbyterian minister Eugene Bay reminds us that, “if what the preacher has in mind for Trinity Sunday an instructional sermon on the doctrine of the Trinity,

there are more suitable texts than John 16.” Thank you, John, because I certainly didn’t have that in mind.

John’s gospel doesn’t attempt to offer proof of how the trinity works, instead, it describes the activity of the spirit in advancing the teaching ministry of Jesus. Jesus invited the disciples to follow, not to believe, says Reverend Cheryl Lindsay, and he does the same for us to this day. Jesus offers belonging and experience, rather than doctrine, tenets and regulation. In this way, we are called to live as Jesus teaches, seeking the truth that will end up glorifying him in the end. While our complex human selves have the capability for many things to be true at the same time, we know the truth that will glorify Jesus, even if we can’t yet live it. Love your neighbor as yourself. Make peace. Spread kindness. We’re not there yet, though. In a world where the concept of truth is for sale to the highest bidder, where war still tears us apart, where we can’t seem to find common ground, where wealth is rapidly shifting in the wrong direction...Jesus apparently still has told us more than we can bear.

We do not have all the answers, so what we have left is to get up every morning, and live a spirit guided life, in which we praise the wisdom of a Creator, who shows us a world bigger than us, bigger than the tyrants that threaten us, a world so interconnected that we can’t possibly fathom it, and probably shouldn’t try too hard to.

A life in which we give gratitude to a redeemer, a God so invested in humanity that they were willing to experience death from our own ignorance, for no other reason than to show us what it means to give it all away, and remind us that we don’t need to anymore...that has been done, and now we have another chance to live into God’s teachings .

A life in which we seek the wisdom of a sustainer, a spirit that guards and amplifies the interconnected nature of the creator's world, and helps us to find magic out of our own despair.

Creator, redeemer, sustainer. The father, the son and the holy spirit.
Three in function, one in body.

One of the simplest, yet most beautiful examples of that function I can think of comes from an experience that I shared here 8 years ago, and will share again now.

At the end of my second full year as a principal, I decided that I was tired of being jealous of students' trucks, and could finally afford my own. In North Carolina, I found a 2013 Tacoma crew cab, manual transmission, which I foolishly sold during the pandemic, and still miss intensely.

On the way back up from that trip, I woke up in Winchester, Virginia, eager to get back home. After clumsily navigating an eight lane side street and almost wrecking the truck I had owned for only 8 hours, it quickly became clear that not only did it once again need fuel, but I would need coffee to kick off the full day of driving ahead.

Now my typical morning coffee-making experience consists of stumbling through any variety of store or gas station, trying my very best to avoid most manners of human contact. It validates my still shy and awkward existence, an introvert doing an extrovert's job. I didn't have that option that day.

The man's voice behind me was kind yet startling.

“Here in the VA, the coffee line’s about the friendliest place you can imagine, save for the medicine line, that is.” I looked over into the smiling face of an older man of color standing next to me. I quickly let him know that I used to live in Virginia and certainly missed the friendliness, wondering how he so quickly pegged me as an outsider, and not wanting to appear like an unfriendly northerner.

His response was that he actually wasn’t originally from Virginia but wasn’t going home.

He was from a place called Washington, had I heard of it?

I asked why he left, and before I could ask Washington DC or Washington state, he let me know that an orange man (had I heard of him?) had moved in with a big house at either end of town, and there was no getting away from the invasion of his hometown, save for coming out here and getting on with life. I figured out which Washington pretty quickly.

We talked for a minute about tweets and cable news, both of which he had absolutely no use for, instead preferring to spend his time getting to know everyone. Face to face.

He then exuberantly and sincerely wished me a great day and wonderful trip home, just before greeting an employee with a warm hug and a warning that the French Vanilla creamer wasn’t flowing too well right now, probably because they keep giving those French cows too much vanilla to drink.

As I was leaving the gas station, I noticed him getting into a small truck with a lawnmower in the back, the license plate reading “ME N GOD”. Amen, I found myself saying, Amen.

The creator gave us both a world much bigger than us, in which all we could do was marvel at the beautiful sky, delicious coffee smell, and live in faith that we’d still land where we needed to be, both travelers away from home, one by choice, one by exile.

The redeemer reminded us that there was forever hope at the end of our respective tunnels, whether they be dangerous 8 lane side streets, or native lands suddenly made unwelcome.

The sustainer brought us together, enabling a conversation in which the stranger’s warmth and faith was a beautiful guiding light, at a time when I was deeply questioning my own, and a time at which I can only pray my engagement was a point of light that random white people were still approachable in rural Southeast gas stations.

Maya Angelou asserts her bold faith that

When we come to it
We, this people, on this wayward, floating body
Created on this earth, of this earth
Have the power to fashion for this earth
A climate where every man and every woman
Can live freely without sanctimonious piety
Without crippling fear

When we come to it

We must confess that we are the possible
We are the miraculous, the true wonder of this world
That is when, and only when
We come to it.

John, and Jesus, remind us that we are not yet there, but come to it we will, with the help of our creator, our redeemer, and our sustainer, the true triune wonder of this world, a God who we are both blessed and bound to live into the image of, with many more things to say to us, some of which we will eventually be able to bear.

Two things can be true at the same time, even when they oppose each other.