

Trinity Church
October 11, 2009

The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
RCL, Year B, Proper 23

A Sermon Preached by The Rev. James C. Ransom

Lord Jesus Christ, you came among us as bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, God among us at long last. We cleave to you with deep joy as you are one with us in divine and holy love. Amen.

The first key that unlocks part of the mystery of divine love given to us today is found in the second chapter of Genesis, where we find Adam languishing in distress. “It is not good that man should be alone,” God says to Adam. “I will make him a helper fit for him.” So God makes all the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and parades them before Adam to see what he would call them. Adam was lonely before, but now he is beside himself. God has just made him the sole proprietor of a pet store. He has to look after and clean up after all these creatures, who, cute as they are, can’t give Adam what he unknowingly yearns for, the completion of his humanity in the love of another. To be human is to be known and loved even as we know and love in return. Dogs are nice pets. But they don’t cut the mustard. God tries again. When God separates the androgynous Adam into man and woman, for the first time humanity is truly created. Adam bursts forth as a true self, able for the first time to love, and he sings the first love song ever uttered. “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; I shall call you Eve—woman—and I shall love you with all my heart and mind and strength—I shall love you as myself and we shall be, as we have always been—one flesh.” And so it is that we become human beings. A touching and deeply romantic tale that defines our humanity.

The second key that turns the lock on the mystery of divine love given to us today is hidden in Psalm 8 as it is referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the hierarchical ordering of things, human beings have it over the creatures of the earth and the birds of the air, but then there are the spheres of heaven, the moon and the stars, and the sun beyond. And then above that in the very presence of God are angels and principalities and power, Cherubim and Seraphim, dominions and thrones—living creatures that give glory to God in timeless celestial being. Amid all this exalted being, the psalmist asks, “What is man that you should be mindful of him? The son of man that you should seek him out? You have made him but little lower than the angels; you adorn him with glory and honor.”

This last Monday we celebrated the Feast of St. Michael and all the Angels, coincidentally the 12th anniversary of my becoming rector here at Trinity. So, just as we give glory to God for the exalted angels who fly at God’s command and worship him day and night in his Temple, we are pulled up short. God did not choose to become himself an angel in order to share divine love with angels. No, denying all logic, God chose to love us lowly humans—and in order to love us became one of us—flesh of our flesh, bone of our bones—as it were.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has it this way, “To what angel did God ever say, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you?’” But God said just that to Jesus—flesh of our flesh, bone of our bones. “Or again, to what angel did God say, ‘I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a son?’” But God said just that to David, and to Jesus, the Son of David. Flesh of our flesh, bone of our bones.

It is hard to believe, but among all the glorious creatures of God’s creating, God chose to love only us human beings. And God loved us by becoming, in all humility, one of us, flesh of our flesh, bone of our bones, Jesus Christ our Lord. He became one flesh in love with us, even

unto death in order that he might destroy the power of death over us. Jesus became a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God's love, making expiation for our sins. Jesus is eternally faithful to God and to us. It is just in this perfect love that God has highly exalted Jesus, who, in his perfect humanity, has been given a Name that is above all names, that at the Name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of all the angels and creatures of heaven above us, and of all the creatures of the earth below us.

And so now, we take these two keys and turn them in the lock of divine love and open Jesus' words in Mark 10, when some Pharisees ask Jesus if it is lawful for a man and woman to divorce. Jesus doesn't answer their question because he knows it is a trick question designed to set Jesus against the law of Moses. Instead, he takes the analogy of marriage and applies it to himself and to our truest humanity in our love of one another. He quotes Genesis 2, our first key, and says, "I am God's fullest expression of love, I have become one flesh with you. I will always love you. I will be faithful to you. I will love you even unto death. My love will raise you up. I am one flesh with you. Of this bond of the deepest divine compassion and affection there can be no Great Divorce, of this covenant of love there can be no breach and no end. My love for you is eternal."

And Jesus says, "Because that is how I love you, and because my Spirit of love is in you, this is how you are free to love one another. You can be faithful to one another in Christ. Your sacrifice for one another can set love free in you for life. Your love for one another can be the expiation for your sins. You can find your true humanity in your love of another, as marriage shows us. Of this covenant of love there can be no Great Divorce. This love is eternal.

So when we reach out that hand of love to another, we sing the love song that made Adam and Eve human. A love song that comes from the true heart and soul of all creation. At last, flesh of my beloved—I will love you as I love my true self. And we shall become as we have always been, one flesh in the heart and soul of God's mystery of divine love.

Amen