

Romans 8:12-17 (NRSV)

¹² So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—¹³ for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

John 3:1-17 (NRSV)

Nicodemus Visits Jesus

3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³ Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹ “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Love, Triangles, Trinity

A sermon preached at North Prospect Union United Church of Christ, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Date: June 11, 2006

Rev. Dudley C. Rose

Texts: *Romans 8:12-17; John 3:1-17*

Garden of Eden – All is well
Until serpent
What does serpent offer?
To be like God, to compete with God
Genesis 3:1-5 (NRSV)

The First Sin and Its Punishment

(Rom 5.12—21)

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” ²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

At first we are very like the triangle of God, Jesus and the world. We love God. God loves us. We both love the world. Paradise.

After the serpent. We compete with God. We seek to control the world, to own it, to prove ourselves masters of it and our destiny.

We have wars and rumors of wars to own, control, and become masters.

We think of the resources of the world as something to serve us, give us what we want

strip mining

oil drilling

shrinking polar cap

We no longer love God. Nor do we love the world. We look to them both to get what we desire. God bless America. Alla Akbar. Both call for God to make them the winner and, like James and John, get the good seats in heaven.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

God set up the triangle. God and Jesus loved the world. Jesus did not compete with God. God was not his rival. He loved God. He worked to the same loving end that God did.

He came to save the world. Notice, he did not come with a war-club to save the world. He came to save it by loving it.

And his loving extended far beyond caring and caring for. For he came that we might be born again, born of the Spirit. That is, that we might be changed, drastically. That the triangle of God and us and the world might be restored to its original composition of love of God and love of the world.

The Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is that force by which we must be reborn. It is that force between the triangle of love and our triangle of contention, rivalry and plunder. It is that force which seeks to realign the triangle we form with God and the world into the triangle in which we love God and the world.

In the words of Paul, “You have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!”¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.”

The stakes could not be higher. Again, to paraphrase Paul says, For if you live according to the way the serpent taught you, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the serpent’s way, you will live.” Jesus came that once again we might choose life. The Spirit resides with us still that we may always be urged from our perishing., urging us, urging us, urging us: choose life, choose life, choose life. Amen.