culture, as if the culture posed all the right questions. As the text puts it, "the world cannot receive" the Spirit, "because it neither sees him nor knows him" (14:17). Without taking a superior stance toward the world (after all, the Spirit is a gift), the church follows a script that seems to the world no more than an impossible jumble of letters.

For another thing, the peace that the church seeks and receives is distinctive (14:27). All those "peaceful" scenes thrust at us by Madison Avenue, enticing as they may be, turn out to be mirages, false promises that haunt us in the seeking. The peace given the church is nothing other than the promise of the divine presence, the assurance of people not orphaned and destitute.

The Gospel of John confronts us with sobering and penetrating words for Pentecost.

Trinity Sunday

The lessons for Trinity Sunday offer an additional opportunity to consider the work of the Holy Spirit. For instance, Rom. 5:1–5 makes reference to God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Paul obviously does not have a detailed doctrine of the Trinity, but the three "Persons" are present, and it is through their mutual work that the believer experiences peace. In particular, it is through the Holy Spirit that the love of God "has been poured into our hearts" (Rom. 5:5). As the lessons for last week also suggested, this peace does not preclude suffering.

The lesson from John is another passage in Jesus' "farewell discourse" that mentions the Spirit. The Spirit's role in this case is teacher. The Spirit "will guide you into all the truth," including "things that are to come" (16:13). An exploration of this remarkable claim will involve the preacher in a consideration of the relationship between the Spirit and Jesus. What the Spirit teaches will be in continuity with what Jesus has already made known (vs. 14–15).

Even the lesson from Prov. 8 may be pursued in a direction appropriate to Trinity Sunday. It is likely that the figure of personified Wisdom lies behind the Logos Christology of John 1. Thus, the text opens the way to consider the feminine dimension of the Godhead.

The mention of "glory" in Ps. 8:5 and Rom. 5:2 offers another possible theme for preaching. The juxtaposition of Pss. 3—7 with Ps. 8 suggests that the God-given "glory" of humanity is not incompatible with suffering. This conclusion is reinforced by Rom. 5:1–5. To "boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2) means to "boast in our sufferings" (v. 3). As the Romans lesson from last week suggested of the relationship between the believer and Christ: "We suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him" (8:17).

Proverbs 8:1–4, 22–31

A reasonable God has created a rational world. Such a declaration might be suggested as containing the essence of this day's Old Testament lection. Yet this affirmation of rightness and order is expressed not in a logically structured argument—such as an ancient Greek philosopher might have made—but in an arresting poem impregnated with metaphor and personification, the language of the wisdom schools of the ancient Near East. Behind the poetry is a statement about the majesty and creative control of Israel's God, one that finds resonance with other parts of the Old Testament, of which Ps. 8, this Sunday's Psalm lection, is an outstanding example.

The initial section of our text (Prov. 8:1–4) introduces the figure of Wisdom, a personification that is feminine not only in the Hebrew Bible (compare Job 28, and note Sir. 24), but in much of the literature of ancient Israel's neighbors. In the characterization here, Wisdom stands in the most populated, high-profile spaces of life ("the heights," "the crossroads," "the gates," "the entrance of the portals") to broadcast her message. It is a message intended for every woman and man, and it is one that contains the gift of life (v. 4; compare vs. 35–36). (Although they are not part of the lection, vs. 6–21 amplify the themes of vs. 1–4, in that they describe how Wisdom's message is both true and good and how human life is enriched by embracing it.)

The heart of the text (vs. 22–31) declares that the rationality of Israel's God expressed itself at the beginning of creation and—for those who are willing to see it—this rationality, this wisdom, has been in evidence ever since. Order, structure, sanity are not Yahweh's afterthought; they are part of the very fabric of creation in that they are a reflection of Yahweh's own nature. Verse 24 is interesting in that it seems to resonate to both Old Testament "accounts" of the Creation, that of P (compare the "depths" with Gen. 1:2) and that of E (compare the "springs" with Gen. 2:6). The fact that this Wisdom poem thus seems to have been composed after the book of Genesis had reached its present shape is one of many evidences scholars cite for regarding Prov. 8 as a relatively late literary creation—although one that contains very ancient conceptual roots.

Other Creation motifs follow that find parallels in various parts of the Hebrew Bible (compare v. 25 with Ps. 90:2; v. 27 with Job 26:10; and so on). All these citations of Yahweh's creative skill and power converge in v. 30, which insists not only that Wisdom was present at Creation, but that she played an important role at the world's beginning. Wisdom was, in effect, Yahweh's "assistant creator."

A technical discussion is in order here. NRSV probably has it right when it translates the first line of v. 30 "I was beside him, like a master worker." This clearly makes Wisdom and Wisdom's attributes of rightness and order part of the very constitution of the world (or, as modern people would say, "of nature"). But as the NRSV marginal note points out, there is some doubt about the Hebrew word (*'āmôn*) translated "master worker," because by reading the vowels differently, the word means something like "little child" or "nursling" (and one remembers that the vowels were not supplied in early Hebrew manuscripts). At least one important ancient Greek translation, that of Aquila, has it as "child." Thus other renderings of this verse must be taken seriously, such as the Revised English Bible:

> Then I was at his side each day,
> his darling and delight,
> playing in his presence continually. . . .

or the New Jerusalem Bible:

> I was beside the master craftsman,
> delighting him day after day,
> ever at play in his presence. . . .

It is frustrating to the interpreter when ambiguity or uncertainty clouds a key term, but in this case the weight of the textual evidence is on the side of NRSV, and the preacher may feel on solid ground in drawing theological conclusions from this way of understanding the text.

The sum of our passage, then, would appear to go like this: Yahweh has fashioned an ordered and good world, a reasoned shape that is evident for all to see. When women and men allow this Wisdom to govern their lives, the result is wealth (v. 18), justice (v. 20), happiness (v. 32), and life itself (vs. 4, 35–36). The experience of a truly wise person begins with a fear of Yahweh (v. 13; compare Prov. 1:7) and is consummated in joy and prosperity.

The strength of such a proposition lies in its obvious appeal, not just to the human mind, but to the emotions as well. Life *is* under control. Given the presuppositions of Wisdom, truth may be known and one's day-to-day living adjusted accordingly. Evil is banished; randomness and chance are kept at a safe distance. "God's in his heaven: All's right with the world," as Robert Browning put it.

Yet those who live in the "real" world know that this declaration, while genuine, is only partial. Evil is not so easily dispelled. Chance

and chaos lurk on every hand. Job knew that well, and complains against all tidy rationality, such as that expressed in Prov. 8:

> The earth is given into the hand of the wicked;
> [God] covers the eyes of its judges—
> if it is not he, who then is it?
> (Job 9:24)

Yet while evil and chance must be dealt with day by day, beyond the apparent randomness of things is the compassion of a rational God. Perhaps when all has been said, that is the real value of Prov. 8.

Psalm 8

The psalms preceding Ps. 8 have depicted human beings who are beset by "many . . . foes" (3:1); who are "in distress" (4:1); whose "honor suffer[s] shame" (4:2); who are "sighing" (5:1); who are "languishing," "struck with terror," "weary," and "weeping" (6:2–7); who are pursued and threatened (7:1–2). Even so, Ps. 7 ends with the psalmist's promise to "sing praise to the name of the LORD" (v. 17), and Ps. 8 is a song of praise that fulfills that promise. In so doing, it offers a remarkably exalted view of the human being that must be heard alongside Pss. 3—7.

The most obvious feature of Ps. 8 is the refrain that frames the psalm (vs. 1, 9) and draws attention to Yahweh's sovereignty (see Ps. 93:4 where "majestic" occurs in the context of the affirmation that "the LORD is king"). Whereas the boundaries of Ps. 8 focus on God, the center of the psalm focuses directly on humanity: "What are human beings . . .?" (v. 4). The words "how" (vs. 1, 9) and "what" (v. 4) are the same in Hebrew, so the reader is encouraged to hear the boundaries and the center together. Indeed, according to Walter Brueggemann, the key interpretative question for Ps. 8 is how to hold the boundaries and the center together. In short, structural observations lead toward theological conclusions (*The Message of the Psalms*; Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984, pp. 37–38).

The structure of Ps. 8 affirms the central importance of humanity (v. 4). The human, seemingly a mere speck in a vast universe (v. 3), is "a little lower than God" and has been "crowned . . . with glory and honor" (v. 5). The language is used elsewhere of human kings and of Yahweh as king (see "crown" in 2 Sam. 12:30; Ps. 21:3; Jer. 13:18; "glory" in Pss. 21:5; 24:7–10; 29:1–3, 9; 145:5, 12, NRSV "glorious"; and "honor" in Pss. 21:5, NRSV "majesty," and 145:5, 12, NRSV "splendor"). In short, the sovereign God bestows sovereignty on the human creature. The human has "dominion" over "all things" (Ps. 8:6). The occurrences of "all" in vs. 1 and 9 as well as vs. 6–7 suggest that God's majestic sovereignty *includes* the dominion of humanity (see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry;* New York: Basic Books, 1985, p. 119). God has chosen to share God's power! To fail to recognize the remarkable vocation of humanity in the created order would be to risk shirking the God-given responsibility to be partners with God in the care of creation.

It is just as important to recognize, however, that human honor, glory, and dominion are God-given gifts, not inherent qualities or inalienable rights. Again, the structure of Ps. 8 is the clue to this theological conclusion. Both structurally and theologically, human centrality and dominion (vs. 4–8) are bounded by God's sovereign majesty (vs. 1, 9). Human dominion is *derivative.* If the centrality of the human is not understood as bounded by God's sovereignty, then the exercise of dominion becomes simply autonomy, self-rule. In the psalms, the assertion of the human self apart from the claim of God is the essence of wickedness, and it invites disaster, ecological and otherwise (see James Limburg, "Who Cares for the Earth? Psalm Eight and the Environment," *Word and World* Supplement Series 1 [1992]: 43–52).

The foregoing discussion of the boundaries and center of Ps. 8 may shed light on v. 2, which is notoriously difficult to translate and understand (compare the RSV and NRSV translations). As the NRSV renders it, v. 2 seems to suggest that God uses the speech of helpless infants as a first line of defense against God's "enemy"—perhaps the chaotic forces represented by the "formless void" and "darkness . . . of the deep" in Gen. 1:2. This may anticipate the affirmation of vs. 3–8 that God uses the weak and seemingly insignificant human creature as a partner in the task of caring for a creation that is persistently threatened by its enemy, chaos (see Gen. 1:1–2:4, to which Ps. 8:6–8 is clearly related; compare also Job 38:8–11; Pss. 74:12–17; 104:5–9).

In any case, the remarkable affirmation of the human creature in Ps. 8 should be heard, as we stated, alongside Pss. 3—7. The movement from Pss. 3—7 to Ps. 8 raises a crucial theological question: How do we understand a creature who both suffers miserably (Pss. 3—7) and yet is "little lower than God" and "crowned . . . with glory and honor" (8:5)? In a word, the juxtaposition of Pss. 3—7 and Ps. 8 suggests that the "glory and honor" of humanity are not obliterated by suffering. In other words, to be in the "image of God" inevitably involves suffering. It is to this

conclusion that the book of Job also points, and, not surprisingly, Ps. 8 figures prominently in Job. For instance, Job in his suffering specifically denies the affirmation of humanity found in Ps. 8:4–5 (compare Job 7:17 with Ps. 8:4, and Job 19:9 with Ps. 8:5). Eventually, however, God challenges Job to accept the vocation articulated in Ps. 8 (see Job 40:10); and Job says finally, "I . . . change my mind about dust and ashes [=humanity]" (Job 42:6; for this translation as opposed to NRSV, see J. Gerald Janzen, *Job,* Interpretation series; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985, pp. 254–56). In short, Job understands that being human inevitably involves both suffering and glory, and furthermore that the human experience of suffering is ultimately a participation in God's suffering with and for creation!

Thus, the juxtaposition of Pss. 3—7 and Ps. 8, along with the book of Job, articulates the understanding of God and humankind found in the New Testament. In Heb. 2, which quotes Ps. 8:5 (Heb. 2:9), it is Jesus—"the reflection of God's glory" (Heb. 1:3) and the full embodiment of authentic humanity (see Heb. 2:14, 17; 4:15)—who demonstrates that God's glory is not incompatible with suffering and thus that the suffering of humanity does not prevent humans from sharing in the glory of God (Heb. 2:10–18; see "glory" in 1:3 and 2:10). Finally, therefore, when heard in its larger literary and canonical context, Ps. 8 calls humanity to live under God's rule and to exercise "dominion over . . . all things" as a suffering servant (see Mark 10:41–45; Phil. 2:5–11).

Romans 5:1–5

In Rom. 5, Paul begins to explore the nature of the new life of those who have been "justified by faith." The letter earlier affirms with relentless power the sinfulness of all human beings (1:18–3:20) and then the radical intervention of God in the event of Jesus Christ (3:21–31). Now the topic shifts to the consequences of that event for human beings: "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 1); "we boast in our hope" (v. 2); and "God's love has been poured into our hearts" (v. 5).

In contemporary English, the word "peace" is used in a variety of ways, some of which are quite subjective and individualistic, such as "being at peace" with oneself or feeling "peaceful." In its biblical context, however, "peace with God" primarily connotes an objective sense of peace, the peace that comes when conflict is at an end (see, for example, Ps. 72:7; 147:14). Given Paul's earlier portrayal of sin as the entrenched human denial of God or rebellion against God (Rom. 1:18–32), peace with God connotes recognition that such rebellion is at an end.

In addition to peace, justification produces the "hope of sharing the glory of God" (v. 2). Paul traces the birth of hope ("suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope," vs. 3–4); as he does so it becomes clear that he uses hope in a sense far different from the flabby and trivial hopes for pleasant weather or a hearty supper. "Hope" for Paul is not the equivalent of desire or wish. To the contrary, hope refers to confidence, trust, conviction. The "hope of sharing the glory of God" is Christian certainty that God's glory will be shared with all.

Hope "does not disappoint" because "God's love has been poured into our hearts" (v. 5). Although grammatically the phrase "God's love" may refer either to human love of God or to God's love of humankind, in this passage Paul almost certainly has the second meaning in mind, as is clear from his comment on God's love in 5:8. In fact, Paul does not often use the vocabulary of "love," apart from references to the beloved in the churches (see, for example, Rom. 1:7; 16:5; 1 Cor. 4:14; Phil. 2:12). When he does speak of God's love, it is, as here, in connection with the action of sending Jesus Christ on behalf of humankind (as in Gal. 2:20).

Those who are justified, then, have peace, hope, and love. For these gifts and in these gifts they may boast. That may seem an odd assertion from the man who elsewhere writes that "boasting is excluded" (Rom. 3:27; compare Rom. 2:17; 1 Cor. 1:29; 5:6). But here Paul does not contradict himself, for the problem is not boasting in and of itself, as if boasting were simply a matter of bad taste or flawed manners. The criterion for discerning whether boasting is or is not acceptable is the basis on which it is done. People who boast in their own accomplishments (or what they believe to be their own accomplishments) stand condemned, but those who boast in God or in the things made possible by God are praised.

It is important to notice that peace, hope, and love are already, even now, present within the community: "We *have* peace with God" (Rom. 5:1, emphasis added). Given Paul's experience with the Corinthians, who mistakenly assumed that the gifts of resurrection were already theirs, he was wary of asserting too much about the present (as in Rom. 6:5: "We *will* certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his," emphasis added). Does 5:1–5 assign too much to the present possession of believers?

We might answer that question in the affirmative, except for the powerful statements of agency that drive this passage and ground them firmly in God's action rather than in human accomplishment.

To begin with, the peace that believers have with God comes "through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand" (vs. 1–2). Later, it is God's glory that enables Christian hope (v. 2). Finally, God's love comes into the human heart "through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." If believers have peace, hope, and love, it is because and only because of the action of God in Jesus Christ and the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit.

Read in connection with Trinity Sunday, these references to God, Christ, and the Spirit take on a particular significance. In common with other New Testament writers, Paul does not talk about the Trinity as such. The later christological controversies that prompted sustained reflection on the Trinity lay far ahead. Instead, Paul and other New Testament writers search for language with which to express the experience and convictions of early Christians. As a result, their comments do not always yield themselves to a systematic framework.

In this passage as elsewhere, the members of what would later be called the Trinity provide the basis for Christian existence. Christians live in peace with God because of Jesus Christ. Christians know the love of God because the Holy Spirit has poured out that love to them. Christians boast in God's glory, which they know through Christ and the Spirit. If Christians today find talk about the Trinity abstract and remote, for Paul it is as close as life itself.

(For additional commentary on this passage, see the Third Sunday in Lent and Proper 6 for Year A.)

John 16:12–15

The Gospel lesson today includes the final Paraclete saying embedded in the farewell discourse of John's Gospel. Last Sunday, with the celebration of Pentecost, the focus was on the first two of the sayings (14:8–17, 25–27), and the Day of Pentecost in Year B of the lectionary cycle highlights the third, fourth, and fifth sayings (15:26–27; 16:4b–15). Since each of the passages uses common terms for the Spirit and all are set in a common context, there is a natural overlapping in the interpretations. Clearly the focus of the final saying is the role of the Spirit as ongoing teacher in the life of the church.

So much to say and so little time in which to say it is the universal problem when goodbyes are exchanged. A particular problem arises for Jesus in the farewell to his friends. He is the revelation of God, and the events immediately on the horizon—crucifixion, resurrection, and departure—cannot possibly be grasped by the disciples ahead of time. The incidents are not just ordinary occurrences, but fundamental to who Jesus is and what he has come to do.

There are implications to be faced about what Jesus has already said and done. The book of Acts recites the story of the growing comprehension of the believing community about the reception of Gentiles into the church, including even the "conversion" of Peter as he encounters the centurion Cornelius (Acts 10—11). The church has much to learn. "I still have many things to say to you" (John 16:12) puts the Christian community in a learning mode, and the Spirit is the divinely appointed teacher.

"He will guide you into all the truth; . . . he will declare to you the things that are to come" (16:13). Those are rather extravagant claims, but claims for a community that has extravagant needs. While the inclusive scope of the text ("all the truth," "the things that are to come") may be open to being misconstrued, it should certainly not be underestimated. "The things that are to come" no doubt includes both eschatological events and the immediate circumstances the community faces as it seeks to live out its calling. If what the church needs is not new information but fresh discernment, better focused eyes with which to read the signs of the times and the relevance of its message, then the Spirit is a timely gift.

In technical language, the Spirit is the critical hermeneutic for the church. The Spirit is the indispensable reality for the community as it seeks to interpret its tradition and its context. The Spirit enables the church to be a community of both memory and hope. The Spirit "brings forth fresh light from the Word" and enlivens it for its readers. If the Spirit is not operative in its vision, to enable the understanding of its sacred text and to expose the true situation of the world, then the church is left to its own distorted sight.

How can the church be sure? How can it discern what is right and what is wrong? How can it determine which of the many voices speaking is the voice of the Spirit? Does it go with every new fad? The Johannine community itself had problems with contesting claims that finally resulted in schism. The warning is appropriate: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). Not every new burst of energy, not every spurt of growth, not every surge in attendance is necessarily to be identified with the Spirit's activity, and not every speaker mouthing biblical phrases represents the voice of God.

The text offers something of a test in depicting a decisive charac-

teristic of the Spirit: "He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you" (16:14). No new revelation is offered as an addenda to Christ. As one commentator puts it, "Pneumatology is subordinated to christology" (Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles;* New York: Crossroad, 1992, p. 219). The Spirit quickens the community's sensitivity to the revelation already given in Jesus rather than uncovering unheard-of data. What does not cohere with what Jesus taught and did cannot have come from the Spirit of truth.

The Spirit's role, then, is self-effacing, in that the attention falls somewhere else—on a deepened appreciation of the Christ-event. Maybe this explains the difficulty the church often has had in talking about the Spirit. To discern the Spirit rightly pushes one inevitably to reflect on the One about whom the Spirit bears witness.

For Trinity Sunday, this fifth Paraclete saying speaks primarily to the relationship between Son and Spirit. The final verse mentions also the Father (16:15), and in the broader perspective of John's Gospel refers to the mutuality shared in the godhead.

Proper 4

Ordinary Time 9

Sunday between May 29 and June 4 inclusive (if after Trinity Sunday)

The question that lies just beneath the surface of the Gospel lection for this Sunday serves as a telling introduction to all the readings: Who has power?

Elijah has no power. He is but a "troubler of Israel," as Ahab calls him in 1 Kings 18:17. Yet Elijah knows that the prophets of Baal, who seem to have power by virtue of their numbers and their influence with the people, are the ones who truly stand powerless. Elijah's prayers summon the power of God, while the prayers of the apparently powerful prophets of Baal summon only judgment (see 1 Kings 18:40).

Paul has no power. The churches in Galatia have learned that the gospel he proclaimed to them was derivative and, indeed, defective, for he neglected to teach them to observe the law of Moses. He has no authority with which to enforce his understanding of the gospel. He can only insist, as he does in this lection, that there is one and only one gospel, no matter who preaches it. And he can and does, in the remainder of the letter, explain the character of that gospel in his own life, in their experience, and in the language of scripture.

The centurion of Luke 7 does have power. The citizens of Capernaum know that, and they urge Jesus to heal the servant of this powerful man. He has used his power well among the people, even to the extent of building them a synagogue. And the centurion himself knows his power, but he also knows its limitations. He is not worthy to have Jesus, the powerless one, enter his home. For this acknowledgment of where real power lies, Jesus praises the man's faith and demonstrates once again the power of God.

The question of who has power finds its most direct answer in Ps. 96: "For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised" (v. 4). Not only must the peoples of the earth recognize this power, but so must their gods, and the heavens and earth themselves. The coming judgment will provide final confirmation of this power over all the earth.