

# SERMON: TRINITY SUNDAY 08

Genesis 1:1-2:4a; PS. 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

## **Introduction: Mindfulness and Response**

Part of China and untold numbers of Chinese families are suffering greatly from its recent earthquake. Myanmar, also known as Burma, is suffering now and will continue to suffer in its ability to produce its staple crop, rice, because of its recent devastation from a cyclone. These events are ones we can only assist through our mindfulness about the men, women and children in dire distress.

With that mindfulness we can pray for them and we can give from our own resources. And we can stay informed, ready to support others whose calling it is to offer direct assistance through well-organized relief organizations, such as our own: Episcopal Relief and Development. Thank you for your generous outpouring for our sisters and brothers throughout the world.

## **Mindfulness**

This method of mindfulness, prayer and support is the only way I know to do anything about the needs of others around the world, and about helping one another here in our own church and in our own community. In our Beijing Circle we begin our sessions by ringing a mindfulness bell, letting its rich tone resonate throughout our bodies...all to get our body and spirit in tune with the persons around the table and with our God.

Mindfulness is what it takes to do anything worthwhile: mindfulness, attentiveness, focus. Listening well, for example, requires the discipline of being attentive to the other, be it in a personal situation, a lecture—a sermon even—or music, and regarding music, Oliver Sachs teaches us that music occupies more areas of our brain than language does—that human beings are a musical species. Musicophilia is innate, and therefore, universal. We listen to music with our muscles, and as all of us know by experience who have or have had members of

our families suffer from the ravages of memory loss, music and the ability to enjoy and produce music remains when language leaves.

## **TRINITY SUNDAY**

As we commemorate Trinity Sunday today, always arranged in its proper place on the Sunday after Pentecost, I ask us to be especially mindful about the indisputable power and communicative value of music. Why? Because the mystery of the Trinity—of the Godhead—is inexplicable. That's why it is mystery. Any notion or concept or theology devised by humankind over all ages and places is but an attempt to express our connection with the Other---with the Divine.

The limitations of language we know well. As fantastic as language is, and it is fantastic, it has its boundaries. The early Christian writers, in both the East and the West, struggled to explain who Jesus was, who God is. Interpretations abounded and still do. It is inevitable, because the Divine is divine, are we are human. Music may well be the language that connects the two spheres of human and divine existence. Certainly it is a gift to humanity at the very least.

## **Remembering**

It is no secret that we remember our theology better when we sing it. Church musicians are often the best of theologians, for they teach about God and humanity's relation with and response to God and neighbor every time they choose a hymn or an anthem. As we sing, we read and think and pray all at the same time, and experience a joyful noise indeed! Or we listen, mindfully, to the choir which has been tuned to sound and inflection to best communicate the intent of a particular piece of music. We, here at St. James, are so fortunate to have not only a disciplined and dedicated choir of note, we also have soloists, duos, trios, and small orchestras at times to assist us in our spiritual quest to reach for the stars.

This past week, the renowned pianist, Garrick Ohlssen, graced the shores of our community==brought here by the La Jolla Music Society== through his playing

and by his willingness to share about his favorite Russian composer, Alexander Scriabin who was born on Christmas Day in 1872 and died on Easter Day in 1915.

*(Alexander Scriabin (1872-19??) A graduate of Moscow conservatory, this very talented pianist and composer was taught piano by Zverev (the piano teacher of Rachmaninov), composition by Arensky, orchestration by Safonov (who later became an eminent conductor, leading the New York Philharmonic Society). Later he left the Moscow music school, but did not go towards old Russian national traditions. Scriabin became antagonistic to conservatism but at the same time neglected nationalism; became antipodal to The Mighty Five and to Tchaikovsky. Scriabin belonged to the Russian Symbolists, organized against art too saturated with social motives and toward a return to the pure art mastery and restoration of romanticism.)*

Scriabin gravitated to the school of Russian Symbolists and, to my mind, produces music which harmonizes with the goals of the great mystics. Mystics reach inward in ways that are mysterious to most of us, yet they reach out to the world and call us to be transformative. They are prophets in function, calling the world to be responsive to one another through deep listening to one another.

We cannot do deep listening if all we do is say how right we are and how wrong you are. Our 2008 Election campaign rhetoric is a case study of this truth. So is the regrettably uncompassionate rhetoric and blood spilled over competing world-views, often using religion a weapon.

### **From Music and Mystics to Gospel**

King David knew a thing or two about music. After all, David was a shepherd boy with a gift for the lyre and verse. Many of the psalms are attributed to him. Look at Psalm 8 with me, on page 10 of the service leaflet. Verses 4 and 5:

*When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars  
you have set in their courses, What is man what you should be mindful of him?*

*The son of man that you should seek him out?*

These brief verses illustrate the poetry of theology, and the artistry of music. The psalms are songs which call us out of the mundane and lead us toward the Divine.

Like all sacred music does from cultures around the world.

The mystic points us to the Other, and music is often the instrument. This is very much what Scriabin thought and experienced himself. This is undoubtedly true for many artists as well, for art can point us, lead us, and encourage us to look beyond ourselves upward toward God. The Orthodox Cross is designed this way: The Orthodox Cross has a slanted bar to symbolize *theosis*, the theology that human beings are called to become like God...and the slant is upward to symbolize the journey of theosis.

This concept of theosis is made clear through the statement of St. Athanasius of Alexandria, whose feast day we celebrated on May 2:

"The Son of God became man, that we might become God."

II Peter 1:4 says that we have become ". . . partakers of divine nature," and Athanasius amplified the meaning of this verse when he wrote that *theosis* is "becoming by grace what God is by nature" (*De Incarnatione*, I).

The journey toward God requires praxis...practical exercise of living our lives to the fullest, with the image of Christ teaching us and leading us. *Theosis*, while sounding esoteric, is actually a rich word which connotes the entire Christian experience of living our lives in ways which bring us closer and closer to communion with God.

I feel sure that the composer, Scriabin, was well acquainted with the Orthodox teaching of *theosis*. It seems he journeyed outside the lines of Orthodoxy in later life with this adherence to theosophism; never-the-less, he was undoubtedly influenced by the Russian Orthodox Church's teaching and praxis...our sister church.

### **TRINITY and GOSPEL**

The efficacy of Baptism is inherent in the short Gospel reading we have today. We baptize persons in Name of the Trinity. We know there are not three Gods, but One, and we are grateful that Tertullian, gave us the language of "three persons" to help us talk about God in a Trinitarian way and helped us have more insight about the inexplicable nature of God. He was born in 160 in Carthage and died in 225, a Roman lawyer and church leader who wrote prodigiously, gaining the title "Father of the Latin Church."

I close these words today with inspiring words of grace from the author of II Corinthians: Brothers and sisters...put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree

with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. The  
grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy  
Spirit be with all of you. Amen.

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May 18, 2008