

## The Gyre of God

Sermon, Pentecost 12, Proper 16B, August 23, 2009

Grace Episcopal Church, Elmira, NY

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*1 Kings 8:1 ,6, 10-11, 22-30, 41-43, Psalm 84, Ephesians 6:10-20, John 6:56-69*

In this season of Pentecost in the Old Testament readings, we have been following the story of David. Now we are moving on to Solomon, the son of David, and builder of the first Temple. The Temple provided a “home” for God. In the journey through the wilderness, the Ark of the Covenant was the seat of God “between the cherubim.” Now the Ark and (presumably God with it) were housed in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. But even Solomon in his prayer admits that God cannot be contained, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!”<sup>1</sup> As our understanding of God has evolved, we now know that God is never contained: God is boundless, limitless, and ever-present.

In the Gospels for the Sundays in August we have been reading John 6. This chapter of John is the primary foundation for our theological understanding of the Eucharist. Jesus says, “I am the Living Bread which came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever.”<sup>2</sup> This takes the concept of the Presence of God one step further. Here we have God in tangible form, not only to touch and see, but also to taste, to eat, to consume. Thus as our bodies are nourished, our spirits are nourished as well so that God is present always within us, eternally.

Week before last I took a workshop in encaustic painting. The pigments are ground directly into a mixture of beeswax and damar varnish. I brought one of my paintings to share with you today. This is a painting of the Trinity. When I started out, there were three big gold discs for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and it was really ugly. Sometimes – like many things in life – we don’t get it right the first time; we have to

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<sup>1</sup> 1Kings 8:27

<sup>2</sup> John 6:33-40

back up to make it right. The beauty of encaustics is that I could just heat it up and scrape it off. Now in the painting the Trinity is still sort of visible but inextricably merged with the sky and earth. Nothing is separate; all is one, yet not static but constantly moving. In one encaustic technique hot pigmented wax is applied to the support and then melted and blown around with a heat gun. It is impossible to control. That is the fascination for me. There are many wonderful things that happen, as the pigments take on a life of their own. This sense of constant movement with purpose but not tightly controlled is like life, especially life with God – always moving, never certain, with extraordinary wonderful things happening unexpectedly. This endless, unceasing, beautiful movement is through all parts of creation, the sky above, the earth beneath, and through us too. This is the Gyre of God.

Last week Fr. Han talked about the aorist tense in Greek especially as it is used in the Lord's Prayer. This verb tense conveys a sense of timeless, a once-and-for-allness, without horizon, unbounded.<sup>3</sup> This unending circulation of God is the same way. It is outside of the familiar dimensions of time and space. There is no "here" which implies "not there," or "there" meaning "not here;" but rather and all- encompassing presence everywhere. God is everywhere. It is the same with time. We think of a time "then" that is "not now," or "not yet" also means "not now." All time dissolves in God. God the eternal, before the beginning, and long past the end, all brought into one eternal Now.

These days the parish is living with some uncertainty, we don't know what the future holds for us, what this parish will look like next year, or in five years. But you know, life is like that. Our lives are full of uncertainties; none of us know what our future will be. But we like to have the Church be the one constant in our ever-changing lives, in this swirling Gyre of God. We want to be able to count on its staying the same. We want to be able to have these same doors open in the same way, to come to an unchanging liturgy, to see the same people, to hear the same wonderful music. But right now Father Matthew's health and concerns about dwindling attendance and uncertain finances are threatening that sense of security. The only thing we can do is trust in this loving presence of God.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aorist>

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We can also trust the vestry and others making decisions. This process is being as transparent as possible and we need to trust the process. Trust is the foundation of faith. God did not promise to make our lives easy or comfortable. God simply promised to be with us. The best thing we can do is focus on Now. Right now you are here, participating in this liturgy with friends. This is good. Take comfort and pleasure in the goodness of the moment and trust that the future will emerge in its proper time.

Prayer is our link with the eternal Now of God. Prayer is our reminder that each one of us is a small part of God right now, here, and at home, at work, shopping, sleeping. God is always with us, loving us. We are wrapped in God's love. Prayer is the link between eternal God and our present moment reality. There are many forms of prayer: all are valuable whether alone or with others, with words or no words. The point is to see yourself as existing in this unending circulation, existing in the Gyre of God.