

# Golden Trinity

*Preached by the Rev. Thomas M. Kryder-Reid on Trinity Sunday, 7 June 2010, at Trinity Episcopal Church, Indianapolis. Scripture readings: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Song of the Three Young Men, 29-34; Romans 5:1-5; John 16:12-15*

Yes, we've transferred this Trinity Sunday feast from a week ago today, when it actually occurred on the church calendar this year. Here at Trinity Indy, we at least try to be practical—to celebrate our parish feast day when more of us are likely to be here, including, I'll admit, yours truly, incorrigible Indy 500 fan that I am.

Let me note also that each year on Trinity Sunday, preacher as well as preached-to face the inevitable theological conundrum: How can it be that God is three in one and one in three, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all one God? I can only say that I take comfort in some words my New Testament teacher from seminary once wrote. "The doctrine of the Trinity," he emphasized, "is not the result of abstract speculation." Rather, he went on to say, the doctrine of the Trinity "interprets... Christian experience... our experience of the created order... our experience of redemption... our experience of revelation" [Reginald H. Fuller, *Preaching the Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today*, Revised edition, The Liturgical Press, 1984, p. 443].

Now, we could go on and on into complex theological explanations about how, as my teacher said, this three-person "God we experience is God who goes out of himself in self-communication," is God who seeks "within us a response to his self-disclosure." But in keeping with my teacher's advice, I'd rather probe the mystery of the Trinity by sharing an experience—one particular experience of a man known appropriately as Golden the Flower Man.

I

Golden the Flower Man lives in South Africa. I've never met him; I know of him only through my niece Ruth. Ruth visited Golden the Flower Man's flower stand just a month or so ago. She was on a study-abroad trip with students and faculty from the college she attends.

Golden the Flower Man lives in one of the poorest, most run-down shantytowns in all of Cape Town. The houses are tin shacks so dilapidated that my sensitive niece felt too self-conscious even to try to take photographs.

Golden wasn't always the Flower Man, though. Poor as he is, he used to be a lot poorer. So destitute was he

that he literally could not feed his family. His children were on the verge of starvation.

Then one night he had a dream. It was the first of a trinity of dreams, you might say. In his dream, God told him to look out the back door of his tin shack. God said to him, "See all those flowers out there? Pick those flowers. Sell them. You can feed your family."

Golden awoke that morning and looked out. No flowers. No soil anywhere in which flowers could probably ever be grown. There was only the garbage dump that had always been there.

Next night, Golden had the same dream—exactly the same. "See all those flowers?" God said. "Pick them. Sell them. You can feed your family."

Third night—same dream: "Pick those flowers. Sell them. Feed your family."

Hearing about Golden the Flower Man—his dreams—got me reflecting on some of the scripture passages we've heard this Trinity Sunday. Proverbs, for example: "Does not wisdom call... does not understanding raise her voice? ...at the entrance of the portals she cries out..." I hear this writer telling us about what Golden apparently heard: God's Holy Spirit, the wisdom of God's own voice who spoke the whole created order into being, speaking also to us—in our dreaming, in our waking.

Jesus himself echoes that same message in today's gospel. God the Father who created all things, God the Son who came among us as Jesus, speaks to us as God apparently spoke to Golden—as "the Spirit of truth," the Holy Spirit who "will guide [us] into all the truth," who "will declare to [us] the things that are to come."

What things were to come for Golden the Flower Man?

Golden listened. And then he looked out again at that garbage dump, across its scatterings of twisted metal and empty cans amid heaps of rubbish. And from the trash that littered that wasteland, he started picking flowers. He picked out cans and wrappers and other refuse and out of them, with the creativity of God who makes all things new, he started fashioning flowers. Flowers like this one. Part of this is made from a discarded motor oil can. Let me read you what it says down the stem: *Castrol Motor Oil SAE 40 offers basic monograde protection, for petrol and diesel engines...* And these

green and yellow petals—this part appears to be cut and formed out of some kind of lemonade container.

A flower, made from garbage: This is one of many you can buy at Golden the Flower Man's flower stand. My niece Ruth bought it. She brought it home for my parents, and they've lent it to me so I can show it to you. I'll leave it on this table up front for you to see as you come forward for communion.

And yes, because Golden the Flower Man now creates and sells many flowers like this one, he is able to feed his family.

## II

**W**e could get lost today in “abstract speculation” about the three-person being of God. We could go on and on contemplating God as three in one and one in three, diversity in unity, dynamic not static, communal, source and impetus of all communal creativity. Or, we can take a hint from Golden the Flower Man. We can hear the Spirit of God speaking to us, even if we can never fully comprehend the being of God. And touched by the Spirit of God, we can come to see the whole created order, even in its fallen state, through the eyes of God. We can then open ourselves more and more to God's redemption. Awaken ourselves more and more to God's revelation. Discover the world right outside our door for its unseen possibilities. And we can serve and feed others by what we see and create.

A French novelist once wrote, “The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeing new landscapes, but in having new eyes” [Marcel Proust].

Having new eyes was what Jesus' first disciples discovered after his resurrection. They came to see that death cannot frustrate God's love—that by God's grace, life can spring out of any landscape, no matter how bleak, even if scarred by a cross. They discovered what Golden discovered: We can fashion flowers out of garbage. We can share in God's own life-renewing creativity—which, by the way, is much of what the ancient Genesis writer and the early-church doctrine-of-the-Trinity framers had in mind when they wrote of us human beings as created “in the image of God.”

## III

**O**ne other consideration: Let me shift your attention now to your experience of this place, our own back yard. I wonder—if God's creativity can be ours, even to fashion flowers out of garbage, imagine what we can do with the unspoiled, beautiful resources God has given.

Look around here and imagine what we can do. We're blessed at Trinity Church and St. Richard's School with a beautiful parish-school campus. It's a lovely landscape, inside and out—this old-world worship space, gorgeous gardens, handsome rooms. And yet, for a long time, many of us have also realized that many of these facilities no longer adequately meet the needs of our ministries.

For several years now, various task forces and committees of parish and school have been laying the groundwork for developing a master campus plan. We've interviewed many parishioners. You've spoken of our need for Sunday school classrooms that aren't scattered through the school and hard to locate, music rehearsal space that isn't subterranean and stuffy, more meeting spaces for medium-size and small groups, suitable staff offices, closer connection with our Trinity Outreach Center, maybe even a chapel for quiet prayer and intimate worship—to name just a few items. Likewise, St. Richard's families and staff are amply aware of the school's needs: more and better space for early childhood classes, performing arts, athletics, science and computer labs—again, to name just a few, and all of which are vital in an increasingly competitive independent school market. Then there are the access issues we all tolerate. This whole campus is vexingly difficult to navigate. Newcomers and visitors can be driven to despair simply trying to figure out what door to enter, not to mention how to find their way around once they find their way in.

And so, today on Trinity Sunday, our parish feast day, we're offering an exciting opportunity. Immediately following this service, our Campus Planning Steering Committee, representing Trinity and St. Richard's, will show three conceptual renderings of how we might improve and eventually expand this parish-school campus so it can better meet the needs of our ministries, now and into the future. Let me emphasize: These are not finished plans. They are imaginings, dreams on paper—invitations to engage you in communal creativity. Join in the Fortune Room as soon as this service ends. We want and need your input.

After all, what better day than today to take a hint from Golden the Flower Man: dream some dreams and see with new eyes, so we can serve and feed others all the more—starting right here.

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