

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως  
**Trinity Sunday B; 27 May 2018**  
**St. Thomas, Glassboro – Todd Foster**

**A Spirit in Balance**

*In nomine...*

**I. Intro: Balance**

Joe Rizzutto knows a secret about me that most of the rest of you don't know. So I figured I better share it this morning.

Sometimes, just every once in a while, I like to go outside and... ride a unicycle. I'm not especially good at it. I can't idle or go backwards or jump up and down like some people. Back when we lived in Bellingham, Washington and I bicycled to work most days. When the city-wide "Bike to Work" day would roll around each year, I would put away my bicycle. And I would ride the unicycle. Just because I tend to be contrarian like that.

Now what is it they say about learning to ride a bike? You never forget! I think that's more or less true. Riding a bicycle is difficult before you've learned to do it. The bike is always threatening to fall over to the left or to the right. Until you learn to live with the dynamic balance of life between those two tipping points, you don't know how to ride a bike. But once you do, you do. And it's not so hard.

Riding a unicycle is similar. There are a lot more directions in which to fall over. However, once you finally learn it, you learn it. And that balance carries over into all sorts of other pursuits in life, too!

I was having breakfast with a friend recently, and he was talking about his attempt balance all the important areas of his life. He was thinking about his physical life, his intellectual life, and his spiritual life. I was struck by something in our conversation.

My friend knows himself as a triune being. These different dimensions of his life are all important, all worthy of attention and effort. And together they support one another and make for a thoughtful, fulfilling life. My friend is very wise.

In our Gospel account today, Nicodemus comes to see Jesus by night. He comes by night because he's not a public supporter of Jesus. But he's not an antagonist, either. Nicodemus is my hero here. Because Nicodemus is smart, educated, well-respected, and confident in his beliefs. And when those beliefs don't match up with the reality he sees enacted in the life of Jesus, Nicodemus doesn't react poorly. He doesn't get upset and stomp around and start plotting how to get rid of this upsetting Jesus. Instead, Nicodemus has the confidence, the openness, the trust in God, to come talk to Jesus.

Nicodemus lays it out there: It's obvious, Jesus, that you and God are on the same page, because the signs you do are clearly God-given. Nicodemus leaves his question implied: so why are you and I not on the same page? I'm a passionate seeker after God, too!

Nicodemus knew the Scriptures and the stories of God's redeeming actions in Israelite history. He was likely looking for God to act in physical ways, the way God had acted in the past at the Red Sea or at Sinai. Or maybe Nicodemus was hoping to find God through his intellectual pursuit, his study of God's Torah.

Jesus hears the unspoken question of Nicodemus and, like with the rich young man, tells him, "there's one thing you lack." We are called to participate in God's work in the physical world. And we are called to strive after the knowledge of God with our minds. But, says Jesus, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." (Jn 3.3 NRSV)

Today is Trinity Sunday. We're being invited to grapple with what it means to know God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is a profound and baffling mystery: one which defies explanation and yet is evident in the Bible. It's as if God is bigger than our comprehension can grasp. How surprising!

In the story of Nicodemus, I think we're also invited to wrestle with the fact that our own selves are bigger than we often give ourselves credit for. Physical and intellectual doesn't contain the whole of who we are. Spiritual is harder to grasp, harder to address, but no less essential to the reality of who we are, whom God created us to be.

You heard me say it last week, and you'll likely hear me say it again: we now live in the Age of the Spirit. Jesus is inviting Nicodemus into the Age of the Spirit. The Age of the Spirit is the age of the whole of humanity, where the whole person is honored and loved by God, invited into God's *shalom*, that peaceful place of love and wellbeing.

Our own participation in the Kingdom of God is not dependent on our knowledge or our abilities, our stamina or our strength. It is not dependent on us being solid and permanent and unchanging. Rather, it depends on the opposite: our openness, like Nicodemus, to being moved by God's Spirit. Our capacity to change. Our desire to move past the comfortable status quo and to launch out into the wild sea of reality, trusting that God is the one who will bring us safely to our journey's end.

Learning to live in the Kingdom of God is like riding a bicycle. It means learning to leave behind the solid ground under our feet and to live in the dynamic movement of God's spirit. Our efforts at prayer and worship are the ways we train and practice and occasionally get tastes of that dynamic. Our service to others and expressions of love for our neighbor are ways we get a whirl, the pedals once around, of life in God's Kingdom. And it is our steadfast practice, our commitment to these ways of living and worshiping and serving, that creates in us the muscles, the habits, the dispositions, the sense of balance that are increasingly prepared to recognize and to receive the dynamic action of God and to align ourselves with it.

This weekend the United States celebrates Memorial Day, a day to honor those who have served in our nation's military, earning and protecting the freedoms we enjoy and very often take for granted. Any soldier can tell you about training that inculcates habits, not just knowledge but habits and intuitions, that enable large numbers of soldiers to work together to achieve great victories. The lives we live, in worship and in prayer, in the church and in our communities, are our training grounds as we learn to live in the Age of the Spirit. Because someday, when our battles are finally completed, we are going to discover that that Spirit is the larger reality, and that our struggles during this life were a boot camp, shaping us into beings who can live joyfully in God's presence.

I still don't ride a unicycle very well or very often. It's just not sufficiently important to me to spend a lot of time on it. I could be a skilled unicyclist: but that would mean sacrificing something else. We each get to choose which habits, which practices, which skills, which

aspects of our lives we value most. Choose your habits thoughtfully, intentionally. Choose wisely.

**Jn 3.16-17.** Jesus didn't come to condemn the world, to chide the world, to judge the world. Jesus came to point us the way back to the life for which we were created: life with God. God is Spirit, and so are we. We live in the Age of the Spirit: allowing God to remake our lives, from top to bottom, over and over again, is the way forward in this new age. I wish you happy Memorial Day weekend. It's time to get out there and practice your balance.

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