

God and His Friends

Proper 11, Year C, RCL. Genesis 18:1-10a (the Hospitality of Abraham).
The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost. July 17, 2017. The Episcopal Shared
Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance in the Diocese of
Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

It's been a few years since I put on display, as an aid to
worship on Sunday morning, the icon of the Holy Trinity as
depicted by Andrei Rublev. There it sits [on the piano, at
Trinity; just in front of the altar, at Our Saviour].

Andrei Rublev was perhaps the greatest painter (or, as the
Eastern Orthodox tradition says, *writer*) of icons who has yet
lived. He was at work at the end of the thirteen hundreds and
the beginning of the fourteen hundreds. To produce this,
which is now, in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the classic
visual suggestion of the essentially unrepresentable mystery
of the Holy Trinity, Rublev modified the standard icon of the
Hospitality of Abraham by removing the figures of Abraham
and Sarah, leaving the three holy visitors sitting around the
table.

In a way this is unfortunate. That simplification of the picture
does help us focus our contemplation on the mystery of the
Trinity, God in three Persons, as revealed powerfully yet
subtly in the story we heard today from Genesis. But in
leaving out Abraham and Sarah it suppresses an important
aspect of the story: the relationship between God and
Abraham (and Abraham's household) as an example of what

Holy Scripture means when it talks about friendship between God and human beings.

Friends are *welcome, companionable, open with one another, and mutually supportive*. As between people, so between people and God (and even within the Godhead itself, that is, in the inner life of the Trinity, a perfect unity of three persons). With full, bustling Middle-Eastern hospitality, Abraham welcomes God (or at least, we must grant, three angels who precisely represent God). Sarah is in on the welcome—but she is not fully open with God and he gently chides her for it, as one good friend might say to another, “Aw, c’mon—you know better than to try and hide anything from me!” But Abraham and God are open with one another. God reveals his intention to give Abraham and Sarah a son, and God reveals his intentions toward Sodom and Gomorrah (more about *that* next Sunday). For his part, Abraham—famously—dickers with God over the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (again, tune in next Sunday). This exchange demonstrates the mutuality in communication and support that results from those three practices I’m always recommending: prayer, study (especially of scripture) and Godly conversation.

Friendship between God and human beings enriches the life of each person, the life of the community of believers, and the life of all creation. I would say it enriches the life of God too, as long as you understand there is nothing we can provide for God that he needs in himself (the inner life of the Trinity being complete). But there is plenty he longs to give and to do for the life of the world, for the life of this church and all faithful communities, and for the life of each of us.

There is plenty he longs to see *us* give and do. Do we know and trust him well enough to be at peace with him, to welcome him, to be companionable with him, to be open with him, and to support him?

But, really...*me*, support the Almighty? Can a mouse hold up a mountain?

No, but a mouse can do what a mouse can for the life of the world, in due style and proportion. As may any of God's creatures. And especially us, his stewards of (at least!) *this* corner of creation.

Jesus says, in the fifteenth chapter of John, "You are my friends if you do what I tell you." That is how we support God: we hang in there with him in prayer, study and Godly conversation, and we *do* what we discern he intends for us to do. And if what God wants you to do, as his companion, is enjoy, with love and appreciation in your heart, the sunset he lays out before you as a meal for your soul; or if what God wants you to do right now is enjoy that icon with your heart open to wisdom and insight—be glad, be at peace, and draw strength for greater challenges. He will be with you in those challenges too; and he will love you with all the joy and hope there is; and because you rested with him in hospitable companionship now, you will love and honor him better in thought, and word, and deed, whatever comes.

❖ This sermon was greatly enriched by James Montgomery Boice's discussion of today's Old Testament reading in his *Genesis: An Expository Commentary, Volume 2*.