

A Holy Trinity 6.4.23

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

Focus Statement: God was, is, and will always be with us.

Before we get into the sermon today, I want to point something out to you. Did the Second Corinthians reading sound familiar to you this morning? Like maybe you'd heard it before. It should because that is the greeting we start every single worship service with. I give some introduction, we sing an opening hymn, and then I say, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all." To which you respond, "*And also with you.*" I point this out because it's worth remembering, the words we say in worship aren't just things we've made up over the years. Like in communion when we sing "Holy, Holy, Holy," to God, joining the song of the cherubim and seraphim in Isaiah chapter six, we begin our worship with the words Paul used to close his letters. Endings and beginnings are where Greek writers kept the most important parts of their message. So what does it mean for us that we open every worship with these words, with this reminder of our community as anchored in the trinitarian language of the grace, and love, and communion of Jesus, God, and the Holy Spirit? How do these words shape and form not just our worship but our lives together?

I'll leave that there for your reflection, as we lean into the bulk of our readings this morning, and really for the summer. Last summer, Gloria mentioned that we spend a lot of time in the Gospels, as we should, but there's a lot of other parts of the Bible that we don't focus on as much. I've been thinking about that all winter, and Year A of the lectionary cycle, which is the year we're in, is a good year to take a look at some of those texts, because the Old Testament texts walk us through the stories of Genesis. So that's what we're going to do

this summer, we're going to dig into the earliest stories of God's relationship with God's people and hear about the wild, rowdy, and sometimes unpredictable decisions of our ancestors in the faith. Fittingly for a summer in Genesis, the readings for Holy Trinity Sunday in Year A start us at the very beginning, in the first verse of the first chapter of Genesis.

One more note before we begin, Genesis chapter one is not the only creation narrative in the bible. Depending on what you count as a creation story, there are anywhere between seven and twenty creation stories in the bible, each giving us a different lens into who God is and how God works, a different avenue for wonder, one scholar put it, at the beauty and complexity of the world God created. The reason there are multiple accounts of the same event in the bible is because God is too vast for any one story to capture. Like how the Gospel of John ends with the writer freely admitting that everything Jesus did and said cannot be captured in one Gospel, no one explanation could give us all of God. We need different images, focuses, and ideas to see God from a variety of different angles. So when we read any story in the bible, a good first question to ask ourselves then is what is this particular story telling us about God and God's relationship to the world God created.

"In the beginning," our reading opened. "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep." Right at jump notice this, in the beginning when God created not just the earth, but the heavens and the earth. In the beginning we see a God who puts God's own dwelling place within the very structures of creation. John chapter one, another creation story—fun fact,

says the Word became flesh and lived among us, here in Genesis one we see a God who, before putting on flesh, before the world was created, built God's home in connection with ours.

And then, God created. And not created sort of willy nilly, but with intention. There is incredible order and structure in this creation story, each day pairing with another, each day building on the next. Three days for the framework, three to flesh out each frame. Day one light and darkness, separated from each other, each with its place and purpose. Day four, lights to rule both day and night, the sun in the day, moon and stars at night. Day two the waters and the sky. Day five, fish to fill those waters and birds to fill those skies. Day three, dry land separate from the waters, and, and this is a big shift in God's creative process, for the land itself to produce vegetation. Guys, in day three God is inviting creation itself to take part in the creating process. Day three the land becomes a co-creator with God the creator, that's how early this God who is so desperate for relationship starts to loosen the reins and invite others to take part. But, back to the pairing because day three is coupled with day six, another two-part day. In the morning of day six, God again calls on the land to produce "living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And in the afternoon of day six God created us, humankind, in God's own image. Here it's worth pointing out a couple of different things about the creation of us. First, we get created on the same day as all the other land animals. Yes, we get the whole afternoon to ourselves, but we don't get our own day. We are part of, in relationship with, the created order of the universe, the heavens and the earth, and all

the creeping things. The sermon podcast I like pointed out, “God was making creeping things and cows, and then went to us.”

Shared day aside, there is something unique about the creation of us. When it gets to that point in the process, the text tells us that God said, “Let us make humankind in our image...” Did you catch the plural there, let *us* make. Now, there are no idea of ideas about who God is talking to here, the three parts of the Trinity, some holdover from polytheism, maybe God is just using the royal we. Fun fact, that’s a question for Genesis scholars, none of that particularly matters to me. What I find interesting in the plural is something I read in a commentary this week that pointed out that “let us make” is a consultation, not a command. Like when God said, “let the earth produce,” again we see God seeking co-creators, collaborators, brainstorming partners, in the work of creation. God is so relational that God made us in relationship. We are not the individual work of one divine being, we are a team project. Don’t ask me to explain that, I’m not a good enough systematic theologian for that. Just lean into the depth of God’s desire for connection that such a move implies. The text goes on, “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.” I’m going to pause here real quick too, because that is a verse that likes to get thrown around a lot right now to try and bolster a very particular understanding of gender that is not in the text. This verse is not saying, God made two things, male things and female things, and those are the only things. That would be like trying to argue that all animals are either wild or cows, and I have a very domesticated housecat that begs to differ. What this verse is getting at is the breadth of humanity that is in God’s image. Like no one creation story could fully capture God’s creative nature, no one

human can fully capture God's image. The shades and hues, skills and gifts, identities and orientations, of each of us contain a part of the image of God. To see God's image, one needs to look at the whole spectrum of humanity, and even then there is only part.

And to this spectrum, our God who is hungry and thirsty for relationship, gives to us a central role in God's creative process, to be caretakers of all that God has called good. To be gardeners of that which the land has been tasked at producing. Again, we see in this story a God who gives away power, so that we can participate in the work that God has been about since the voice of God first moved over the waters.

In the beginning was a God who created co-creators, to continue and bring to completion all that God called good. That's something else in this passage. Good doesn't mean finished or perfect, good means good. It means there is still space to grow and change, to shift and develop, to lean deeper into the relationship that God started when God first built the heavens together with the earth.

A whole lot happened between then and now, and we'll read some of that over the summer. But for this morning we are going to jump from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Matthew's Gospel. In Matthew's Gospel, there is no Jesus appearing to the disciples in an upper room showing them his hands and his side. This appearance of Jesus on a hill in Galilee is the first time since his crucifixion that the disciples have been together in one place, and that Jesus has been with them. And there's a lot of great details in this passage for us to resonate on. First off, the text says the disciples went to the mountain to which

Jesus had directed them, but that's not entirely true. Jesus did want to meet them on this mountain, but he hadn't told them, he'd told the women who came to the tomb to tell the disciples. What this Gospel gives us, as people whose knowledge of Jesus came first through another, is that even the disciples came to Jesus because someone first told them. The women were the tellers of the resurrection to the disciples, just like someone first told us about the resurrection, and like we can tell others. This commissioning story is a sending of men who came to faith through the words of another.

Second, when they saw Jesus, they worshiped and doubted. They're literally looking at the resurrected Jesus, who the women told them exactly where to go to find him, and they still doubt. This text reminds us that the resurrection does not bring about in us doubt-proof faith. The life of the church going forward will be what it was before the crucifixion, a complex mix of worship and doubt, hearing and questioning, seeing and wondering, for doubt and worship are two sides to the same coin, part of the spectrum of faith. And, in their doubt and their worship, Jesus commissioned them, and with all the authority of heaven and earth, sent them out to do as Jesus had done for them, as the women had done for them, to make disciples, to tell more about the wonder and mystery and love and grace and communion of Jesus.

And then, at the very end, Jesus left them with this promise. "Remember, I am with you, to the end of the age." And here's something fun. The end of the age isn't a chronological moment, like when the last day is torn off the calendar and time stands still. Rather, the end of the age pulls back to in the beginning. The end of the age is really the fullness of creation.

It is when all that God called good is finished, is perfected, is drawn fully into the vision God had since before the world began. A vision which God since the beginning has made us to work together with God in the completing of.

That's all I've got for you this morning. A lot to think about, a lot to chew on. I hope this sermon left you with more questions than answers. I hope all we've wandered through together has given you doubts and worships and wonderings, things to ponder and places to stand in awe. For the God who since the beginning has longed for relationship has promised to be with us to the end of the age, which means we have a lot of time to learn and grow in love. Thanks be to God. Amen.