

St. Columba's Episcopal Church  
Trinity Sunday – June 4, 2023  
Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Matthew 28:16-20  
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

Today is Trinity Sunday, the only Sunday in the church year set aside to commemorate a theological doctrine or teaching of the Christian church. Theology is, literally, the study of God. Theologians consider the nature of God, the nature of human beings, and the relationship between God and human beings. As an academic subject theology is similar to philosophy. Perhaps there is no other discipline in which it is more important to maintain a sense of humility, to remember that what we have to say about God is bound to be incomplete and inadequate. We need always to retain a fundamental sense of the mystery of God. Nevertheless, it is important for us to use the intelligence God has given us to come to the best understanding of God and our relationship with God that we can and speak the truth about God.

Theology has been described as “faith seeking understanding.” In other words, it is the effort of human beings who have faith in God to articulate the “who” and “what” and “why” of their faith. This work may always be beyond our reach, but for people of faith the questions of theology are important and pressing. Who is God and what is God like? What is my relationship with God supposed to be? How can I become closer to God? How does God want human beings to live? We don't need to be theologians to think about these sorts of questions.

We profess a belief that God is one God in three Persons. As we prayed in the Collect of the Day: we “acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of [the] divine Majesty ... worship the Unity.” The best minds have explained this by stating that God is a community, three persons in relationship and all always acting together. In our recent readings in the Gospel of John we have found this expressed. There is an essential and eternal unity among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of Christ. Christ bears witness to the Father, and the Father glorifies the Son. No “person” of the Trinity acts differently or separately from the other “persons.” Believing, as we do, that God is love, we may describe the community of God as a community of love.

In worship we frequently “name” the persons of the Trinity. As Episcopalians we are most familiar with the words attributed to Jesus in our passage from Matthew's Gospel: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (or “Holy Ghost”). Here at St. Columba's we sometimes use the words of today's Opening Acclamation: “Blessed be God: Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit.” You may have heard “Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier.” In the New Zealand Prayer Book the persons of the Trinity are referred to as “Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, and Life-giver.” The language that is less familiar to us may draw our attention to new ways of understanding the nature of God.

This morning's scripture lessons clearly emphasize God as “Earth-maker.” We heard the first account of creation found in the Old Testament book of Genesis. This is a beautiful, ancient poetic description of God's creation of all that exists. This is not science, and we shouldn't try to read it as science. But there are important lessons to be learned here. First of all, creation is the work of God, and it is good. It is because of this that we believe we should honor God by honoring God's creation.

Secondly, God made humankind “in [God’s] image, according to [God’s] likeness.” God instructs human beings to have dominion over creation, even subdue creation. We know that this biblical reference has been used to justify much that has harmed creation. People have seen it as a “God-given right” to exploit and misuse natural resources and living creatures. The results are sometimes horrifying. But if we have dominion over and subdue creation as creatures made in the image of God, then we cannot act out of greed and selfishness, without regard to the welfare of all human beings, or take ungodly pleasure in harming and killing other creatures. Native Americans have much to teach us in this area, especially in their respect for the natural order in which certain animals and fish are killed to sustain human life.

Another way to look at how we might have dominion over and subdue creation without contradicting our being made in God’s image is to think of how we act regarding many kinds of disease. We would not condemn as morally wrong our attempts to eradicate diseases caused by bacteria – tuberculosis, meningitis – or viruses – polio, coronavirus. We would think it absurd to “honor” God by allowing such bacteria and viruses to flourish, uncontrolled. We honor God by preserving and protecting human life because we believe human beings, not bacteria or viruses, are made in God’s image.

God is love. God the Creator is love. In the words of Eucharistic Prayer B (Book of Common Prayer), “we give thanks to you, O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us in creation.” Think of all the ways God’s goodness is revealed to you in the beauty of this place, especially in this season. The sea, the beautiful blue skies, the green fields and trees, flowers in extravagant color and variety, the promise of crops for delicious and sustaining food. We are blessed to be surrounded by natural beauty and abundance.

When we renew our baptismal vows, there is a question that was added in recent years: “Will you cherish the wondrous works of God, and protect the beauty and integrity of all creation?” Our answer: “I will, with God’s help.” As we know, we must do what we can to avert disaster for the natural world and for the generations that follow us. Many months ago, Erik Bertelsen volunteered to be our “point person” at St. Columba’s regarding Creation Care. He has led us to make better choices about the products we use at the church. He offers us words of wisdom and good advice that are printed in our Sunday service leaflets. Today’s leaflet includes a short list of ways we can help God’s creation. I hope that all of us will seriously consider our faith and how we express our love of God by how we live and how our lifestyles affect the good created world.

Many centuries ago, the prophet Isaiah gave us these words of God: “They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). May our knowledge of God, as we come to it through God’s creation, grow and flourish. And may we live as creatures of God made in God’s image, in such harmony with God that we do nothing to harm God’s good creation, but rather live to glorify God. Amen.