

St. Columba's Episcopal Church
May 31, 2026 – Trinity Sunday
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 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. Our conclusions are inevitably incomplete and inadequate, since God is beyond our full understanding. But for people of faith theological questions are important. Who is God and what is God like? How does God want human beings to live? What is my relationship with God supposed to be and how can I become closer to God? We don't need to be academic theologians to think about these 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.” Some theologians have explained this by stating that God is a community, three persons in relationship and all always acting together. 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”). Though familiar, these names may not be helpful – in fact, they may be a hindrance – to many people, especially the name “Father.” Our experience of other human beings has a profound effect on our experience of God. That can be a plus or a minus. For people who have been deeply hurt or abandoned by a human father, calling God “Father” may be a stumbling block to a close relationship with God.

Fortunately, we have many alternatives to this familiar language. At St. Columba's we often use “Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit” or “Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.” In the New Zealand Prayer Book the persons of the Trinity are referred to as “Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, and Life-giver.” The 20th century English writer on mysticism, Evelyn Underhill, described God as Creative Love, Rescuing Love, and Indwelling, All-Pervading Love. Language that is less familiar to us may draw our attention to new ways of understanding the nature of God, and that may help us come to a deeper connection with God.

We believe that the Trinity is a community of love, bound together so closely that we worship one God while acknowledging that God is love and has the perfect source of love, the perfect object of love, and the perfect expression of love, within God's own self. God is Love: love poured out, love received, love returned. The relationship of love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit has been described with the Greek term “perichoresis,” a dance of love. As creatures of God made in God's image, our task is to align ourselves with God and to express in our lives a human version of the dance – pouring out, receiving, and returning love to God and to our neighbors and ourselves. We need to ask ourselves how our belief in the nature of God as love impacts the way we live. This is called “practical theology,” and it is the proper work of the church and of every Christian.

We believe that before anything else came to be – before there was light, before stars, galaxies, planets, before plants and animals and human beings – there was a Community of Love. The basis of the whole universe is not a solitary Creator but a loving, reciprocal, responsive relationship. Love in community is not something that comes along later in the story of Creation, after there are human beings and animals to love. It is something there from before all worlds.

This morning's reading from Genesis and Psalm 8 clearly emphasize God the Creator, the "Earth-maker." The account of creation in Genesis 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, 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 and 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 often 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. Subtleties of the original Hebrew words in this text have been lost in translation. The word for "subdue" can have a sense of knead, as in bread; in other words, to press into further development. The word for "rule" or "to have dominion" has an overtone of bringing into a more developed state, as in teaching. With these subtleties in mind, we can look at God's commands as God's directions to human beings to help the rest of creation develop and mature, to become all that God intended, as a gardener encourages the growth of the plants in his or her care.

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. Our parish Earth Keeper, Erik Bertelsen, offers us words of wisdom and good advice about our part in that effort, printed in our service leaflets under "Creation Care." I hope that all of us will seriously consider our faith and what it means in terms of how we express our love of God by the way our lifestyles affect God's good creation.

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.