

Genesis 1:1-2:4a
Trinity Sunday
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Sermon preached by Laura Merrill
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Notes not for publication

This beautiful story is well-known and cherished among scriptures, with its lofty poetry, the rhythm and repetition that show it was intended to be read aloud. It is full of detail, and I would guess that most of us see mental pictures when we hear it. But while people of the Bible, Jews and Christians alike, would probably agree on the beauty of the first chapter of Genesis, there would be a whole range of opinions on what it means.

All kinds of people have used the creation story to support all kinds of claims. For some, it's a historical account that tells us exactly the steps God took to create this world, some even believe, in a literal seven days. For others, it's just a myth that sounds a lot like other myths from the culture surrounding the Hebrews at the time this was written down. For some people, this passage is justification for doing whatever we want with the earth, since God gave it to us to subdue and dominate. For others, it's a beautiful story of interconnectedness that inspires stewardship of the environment.

We would be here all afternoon if we really tried to go into all of the issue that arise from this text—creationism, global warming. For today, I think the text has a larger message for us, following upon Pentecost and the birth of the church last week, and this week with our celebration of God as Trinity.

The main point I see springing from the intersection of God as Trinity and this story of creation is that God is seriously invested in community. The doctrine of the Trinity was created by the church as a way to talk about the different faces of God, as

seen in Yahweh, Creator and Covenant-maker, Jesus the Crucified and Risen Messiah, and the Holy Spirit, Energizer and Comforter of the Church. People had known the presence of God in these three, yet it was also clear that this wasn't just God putting on a Jesus mask over here and a Spirit mask over there. The three related to each other. Jesus called upon the Creator God and prayed to God. John's gospel proclaims that Christ as the Word of God was with God when the world was made. The Holy Spirit was present at Jesus' baptism. Jesus breathed out the Spirit on his disciples in the gospel of John, and it blew in at Pentecost to fill the space that Jesus had left.

So the three "persons," as we call them, are distinct in the scriptures, yet the church has maintained that they are also not three separate gods. They are interrelated, so much so that each one shares all of the other two. Obviously that's the mystery part, and the fact is that the nature of God is shrouded to us; it's not something we will ever "understand." But we can push the boundaries of our minds and imaginations and at least try to know how much there is we do not know. And then we can talk about it, we can witness to what we've known and seen of God, each of us with our own little piece of the puzzle.

Through the centuries of Christian tradition, of scripture and conversation and prayer and imagination, what we believe we've found is a God who is one yet whose life is itself relational. Knowing that we cannot finally fully know, we proclaim and profess that at the heart of the oneness of God lies community, according to the Christian witness. And we find in the heart of that community the reality we call Love. One theologian wrote that it is only through the Trinity that we can really say that God

is Love, because love is never alone. (Jürgen Moltmann, "The Triune God: Rich in Relationships," pulpit.org)

It is through this lens that we view the story of creation. We read God's original act, God's word spoken out across the chaos, giving things form and function and breathing life into all of it—this we see as an act of love, an act of relationship. We do not know why God acts in this way; God surely does not need this world, and God does not need us. But God wants it; God wills it. And in the mystery of that will, which we cannot hope to understand, we do experience love. We experience God's reaching out in relationship, both to the created order in general and human beings in particular.

Once it's all set in place, we then read of the interplay between Creator and creatures. Our role in the story, according to the scriptures, is to fight God's gracious movement toward us. A good chunk of the Bible is the story of our running away from God and God's deciding again and again to come after us. God reaches out to draw us errant creatures in, back to our creator. We see it first in creation, then in the story of the people of Israel, through their slavery and exodus, their kingdom and exile and restoration. We see it in Jesus, and we see it in the Holy Spirit. For God's own reasons, God wants to live in community with us.

I think it's a remarkable gift to think of God in this way, as one who is so steeped in relationship, who not only created me and you and called us good, but who, even in the face of our constant resistance and rebellion, continually invites us back in. And maybe as a sign of that commitment to us, as a sign of the value God places on shared life, we read today that we bear God's own image within us. Psalm 42 says "deep calls

to deep,” and it’s as if by creating us, male and female, in the divine image, God has planted the seed for the vine that will carry us home. The image of God in you and in me, reaching out for the Love that is our source—it’s a comforting picture for me.

The question is, how will we respond to this context of love and relationship in which we live and move and have our being? Will we cooperate, or will we resist? Much of the time we resist, but part of what we’re doing here every week and whenever we gather is to encourage each other, to remind each other of the covenant love offered to us every moment of our lives. Part of what we’re doing here is to interpret for one another how the image of God in us can shape our lives.

One way is the assurance that when we commit to sharing life in the Christian community, we find that we are but one piece that fits into a larger puzzle. *[Reading]*

Another mark the image of God leaves on us is through our creative capacity. The work we do everyday to support ourselves and our families, the work of ministry that we’ll commit to in a couple of weeks—these are a way of our living out the image of God embedded in us. When intentionally offer the work of our hands and minds in all things to God, it is a way for deep to call to deep, and for us to seek holy relationship with our Maker.

The image of God implies other things for us as well: the value of seeing what God has done as good and delighting in it; our need for Sabbath rest and renewal, as finite beings, as the infinite God first showed us. The divine image in us calls us to exercise dominion over the world in a particular way, following the example of Christ—he was Lord of all Life yet washed feet and ate with sinners and sacrificed himself for

those who had no voice, who were hungry and forgotten and marginalized. His was a funny pattern of dominion, but it is what we mean when we say Christ is Lord and what we mean when we say God gives us dominion.

The Triune Creator God today offers us the gift of life. That life is complex; it is fraught with challenge and pain. But it is also swirled with blessing—music, color, prayer, touch, laughter, sleep, family, art, food. The God who flung the stars into their courses wants a relationship with each one of us, no matter where we came from; no matter what we've done. The God beyond our knowledge and understanding is claiming you and me today and claiming our lives from here on out. And the God of mystery and wonder is calling us to intimate community, to be Christ's gathered people, trusting and knowing that when we commit to one another, we are drawing close to God.

In *The Luminous Web*, Barbara Brown Taylor describes the shaping of the creation narrative of Genesis as a counter-cultural protest of the people of Israel against the creation story of their Babylonian captors. While their oppressors saw the origins of the universe as violent and bloody, the Israelites told their children a different story rooted in goodness and blessing. Light came from the deepest night, and order from chaos. The sun and the moon and the stars were set as signs of beauty and the changing of the seasons, providing light and direction and the keeping of time. God filled the earth with vegetation that was fruitful and nourishing, moved the waters back from the land and provided a home for the creatures that crawled across it, walked upon it, and flew over it. In the midst of this loveliness, humankind was tenderly placed and blessed and called to be caretakers and stewards. And God looked upon all this, and found it good. (Kate Huey, 5/18/08, i.ucc.org/StretchYourMind/OpeningtheBible/WeeklySeeds)