

Community Presbyterian Church
Cedar City, UT

Sermon

June 19, 2011: Trinity Sunday

Genesis 1.1-2.4a

"It Was Very Good"

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God creates, knowing that things will not go perfectly well with creation, as Calvin's parents find out from their child. But God creates, anyway.

This morning I want to explore with you what we learn about that God, who indeed is Father, Son and Spirit, from this familiar and much loved account of creation.

I would do a grave injustice to the writer of this text to claim that the Trinity appears explicitly in it. But there are hints embedded in the text, as it works to reveal at least a little of the nature of God. For example, we find in this long passage that God is the only one responsible for Creation. Yes, God appeals to his heavenly court when he says in verse 26, "Let us make humankind in our image," but in the very next verse we read, "So God created humankind in his image..." It is also illegal to take that "us" to correspond to the Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit. The Biblical witness to the Trinity is much more subtle than that.

So we know that God is the Creator of all that is: light, dry land, all kinds of plants, the sun, moon, and stars, all fish and birds and land animals, and, of course, all of humankind.

Also in verse 1 we read that "a wind from God swept over the face of the waters." You may be more familiar with the King James rendition: "the spirit of God hovered over the face of the deep." You may also know that there is one Hebrew word for wind, spirit, and breath. Therefore, in keeping with some of the older biblical translations, I like the word "spirit." Now this spirit is certainly understood differently by the writer of this part of Genesis than the Holy Spirit described in the New Testament, but I believe it is one and the same Spirit. The Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters.

Finally, notice how each piece of the created order comes to be: God speaks it into being. Eight separate occurrences of "Then God said," or "And God said." What happens when God says it? It comes to be. God says it, and, the text says, "it was so." So what does that mean? It means

that the word of God carries power and capacity. Then perhaps you remember the beginning of John's gospel, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." As we continue reading, we discover, of course that the Word is none other than Jesus the Messiah. We also read in those introductory verses that "All things came into being through [Christ] and without him was not anything made that was made." At least that's a small part of John's perception of who Jesus is.

The writer of Genesis makes a very subtle connection, I believe with the triune God, the God who is Father, Son and Spirit, by noting that God speaks, and it is so. God's word is powerful and effective. We are reminded then of Jesus, who is the Word made flesh.

So what does all of this mean? It means that while the author of Genesis 1 makes no explicit appeal to the triune God, there are at least subtle hints of the three triune Persons active in these verses.

And this is all natural, isn't it? If God is indeed Father, Son and Spirit, if God is indeed Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, inseparable, then where the Father was (and is) active, then the Son and the Holy Spirit are also active there. Which means that even today, wherever the Father is active, the Son and the Spirit are also active. And what's true of the Father is also true of the Son and the Spirit.

To separate the work and even the being of the Father, Son, and Spirit is to commit the heresy of modalism, which was rejected by the church long ago. Where one of the Trinity is active, they are all active.

What else does this wonderful account of the creation say to us? Well, it is a very worthwhile exercise to place it in its context, or at least the context in which we believe it reached its final form. The narrative may have developed over many generations, but the signs are very strong that it reached the form in which we have it during the Babylonian exile.

The Babylonians had their own creation epic, known as the Enuma Elish, and archeologists actually found a copy of it in the ruins of ancient Ninevah in 1845. There are some remarkable parallels between the biblical creation account and the Enuma Elish, but there are also some very telling differences. In particular in the Babylonian account, the cosmos is created when one god defeats another in battle, and dismembers the body of that god to make the various elements of the universe.

Furthermore, the Genesis account makes it abundantly clear that the sun and moon and stars are created things. Many of the nations that surrounded the ancient Israelites worshiped these heavenly bodies as gods. The Genesis account tells the people of God that they are not; there is only one God, and everything else is created by that God.

In the Babylonian account, many gods. In the Genesis account, one God. In the Babylonian account, the universe is born of violence and hatred. In the Genesis account, the universe is born when the one God speaks, and every bit of it is labeled "good."

I would expect the Israelite exiles in Babylon to take great courage and hope in their God, the true one, who speaks things into existence, versus the gods of their captors. And yes, it is true that the God of Abraham also condones and demonstrates violence at times, but always in the context of righteousness and justice. We can explore those themes another time.

The point is, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit creates not out of violence, but out of some motivation which you and I can only dimly understand. The rest of the biblical witness indicates that the triune God creates, motivated by love and an overwhelming desire to be in relationship with us, his creations. That God wants us to be his, and him to be ours. Throughout the Old Testament, God tells his people that he will be their God, and they will be his people.

With that said, note that God creates every race and people under the sun, and says that all of them are good. It certainly is not true that all of them commit their lives to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but note very carefully that he says it is all very good. Indeed, the text says that we humans, all races and peoples, are created in the image of God, whatever that may mean, and people have long debated it. Perhaps the ability to reason, perhaps the ability to at least partly perceive things of heaven. But we are all created in the image of God.

We know that very shortly in the epic of Genesis we will run into the rebellion and sin of Adam and Eve, which some take to be the Fall into sin of all humanity. And regardless of whether you subscribe to that understanding of the Adam and Eve narrative, you know that there is much that is broken and dark about human nature. Most of us will probably be able to agree that that brokenness and darkness is due to our own individual and corporate sin, rebelling against God, trying to be God, making our own gods. That is the way of separation and heartbreak, but we pursue it, anyway.

So yes, human nature is fundamentally sinful. But at the end of all his work, all of his speaking creation into being, the triune God “saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

Genesis chapter one tells us of a God, the only living God, who creates by speaking. A God who creates, apparently, out of love and desire to enjoy his creation and his creatures. A God, who, even here in the introductory verses of our biblical witness, demonstrates the characteristics of a Trinity.

You and I are made to be in relationship, and indeed in love, with the one true God who is Father, Son and Spirit. We are made to be God’s people, to worship and serve God. We are made for that. To live any other way is to live counter to the reason we exist.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.