

St. Paul's Congregational Church
June 11, 2017, Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Matthew 28:16-20
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Let us pray: may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

It's human, isn't it, to want to hear and tell the stories of who we are and where we came from, to help understand how what came before us has shaped us into who we are today and who we are becoming. These stories, handed down from generation to generation in every culture, are voices in themselves. Think about family gatherings when we listen to the senior generation telling of the history of our own clan – there is a richness to those stories, isn't there – they connect us through the generations, they make us feel a part of something bigger and, for lack of a better word, something more permanent, something more ongoing – these stories give a sense of meaning to our lives.

In the same way, we Christians are people with a story – and we are people of a story! A story told for so many generations – handed down – remembered – a story that inspires us, that challenges us, that even scolds us sometimes – but always a love story – of how God loves us, of how God will do anything to bring and keep us in relationship, of how God is always with us, reaching out to us, challenging us but always, always, loving us: this is a story that's more awesome than any other.

We began this morning with the story of Creation – a story that always moves me with its breathtaking images, that always touches me with the words, “And God said it was good.” Today, though, we heard that story through a poem, called “The Creation” written by James Weldon Johnson in 1927. You might also recognize Mr. Johnson as the author in 1900 of the great song, “Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing” – I first heard this poem at Silver Lake – the Connecticut Conference Summer Camp, as a teenager and it forever changed the way I heard this awesome story of Creation – and my experience of God – the images have stayed with me all these years – the breathtaking word pictures, the majesty of the power and glory of God – they still give me goosebumps – and I have come to be aware that this poem has been part of my call to ministry, as a Christian educator – my hope is that every child, every youth, every person, will have or has had an experience such as this: a moment when a story is burned into them – a story that will forever sit in their heart, a story that will inform their Christian life forever.

This is where our Christian story starts: In the Beginning... God.

And then today we move to Jesus' final words to his disciples as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew: to the great commission – to go forth and make disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And that awesome promise: remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. Jesus' last instructions to his disciples – to us!

So much has happened between these two parts of our Story – from the wonder of creation to the early Old Testament prophets to the coming of the Messiah, to Jesus' teachings, to the events of Holy Week, the coming of the Spirit, and now to the instruction Jesus gives us to go forth to make disciples. We're all here this morning because on some level we know we are part of this Story – this awesome, wonderful

Story of how God loves us – we’re all here because during our lives we’ve heard this story beginning in our childhood, because somehow this story has made a difference in our lives – and we have come to know it really is the Greatest Story ever told. I remember one year when it was a real joy to have one of the confirmands say that he’s beginning to OWN his religion, this story – and to have another say she’s able to see times in her life where God has been at work. Isn’t that what we all hope for, indeed yearn for!

The church observes this Sunday as Trinity Sunday – the next chapter of our story – it always falls on the Sunday following Pentecost – that festival of the church when we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit – God’s presence remains with us always – God continues speaking to bring us into relationship – both with God and each other. We sing the Gloria Patri- - glory be to the Father, the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. We sing the Doxology – praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And it’s usually on this Sunday that we sing that beloved old hymn, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty”. On this Sunday, the church year, in a way, comes together – we celebrate that God the Father, Jesus, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all ONE! What does this mean? Why does it matter? How does it fit?

Unless you’re in confirmation class or taking a course in Seminary, you probably don’t think much about the Trinity – how can God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit all be one?

We don’t have much of a problem with God – Jesus makes sense to us – God Incarnate. The Holy Spirit may be a little more difficult to engage in our thoughts – but we can do it. The Trinity, though....

I remember being in Systematic Theology class in Seminary – sitting in that class listening to the lecture on the Trinity and trying to stay with it. After nearly three hours my mind, and the minds of the rest of my classmates, were nearly mush. I’ll never forget, though, at the end of the class, when the professor took off his glasses, leaned over the podium, and said, “This is all very important to your education – for hundreds of years people have struggled with this doctrine of our faith. And it’s important for you to struggle with it too – but. At the end of the day, it’s all a mystery. We don’t know. We can talk about it, we can study the early writings of the church fathers, we can make statements – but we can’t know.”

Mystery. Wonder. We don’t experience that often enough these days, I’m afraid. And that’s too bad.

I went through some of my old Systematics Notes and came upon Gregory of Nyssa – in about the year 375 he wrote a very deep and confusing treatise called, “On Not Three Gods” – it’s about the Trinity. Hard to read...makes it easy to think, “So What?” But then, I came across a statement, something so simple, so profound, that makes so much sense that the energy seems worthwhile – and for me, very liberating!

He writes, “Concepts create idols. Only wonder comprehends anything”.

Only wonder comprehends anything. According to Gregory, the formation of these Trinitarian concepts serves only to call forth a sense of wonder before God and call us to express that wonder through praise.

A sense of wonder – when we read the Creation Story, we can’t help but know that sense of wonder, can we. When we look to the sky and see a double rainbow over New York City – I experienced that on Mother’s Day driving home from Caldwell – I pulled into Eagle Rock to savor the view. The hard thunderstorm that had passed over us

was over the City – the rainbows were awesome! – The sense of wonder comes perhaps when we have a picture come into our minds of mountains, the endless horizon we experience when we look out over the beach to the ocean, when we first see our newborn child – that brings wonder, doesn't it – and all we can do is say, thank you God!

A sense of wonder. Wonder expressed through praise. See, it's in our hearts that we truly know. Not in our heads. Wonder grows in our hearts, not in our heads. Maybe too often our heads get in the way of wonder, get in the way of the sacred.

This is exactly why we celebrate Trinity Sunday – to experience the mystery of God, the fact that God IS, the wonder of God, to focus on the sacred itself.

And that's good.

How has God touched your life? How has the spirit been leading you lately? Where's the wonder in your life? It's all around us – let's allow ourselves to feel it and experience it. Stop and savor that feeling, that experience. Let it feed you, ground you, as you return to daily routine.

We're surrounded by voices – coming at us from every side. This is as true for our children and youth as it is for us – but by providing a center, a grounding, based on the love of God, the mystery of God, the wonder of God – it's a whole lot easier I think to face the distractions we all face every day. When bad things happen – and they most assuredly will – don't we want to know and don't we want our children to know that there is someone bigger, stronger, smarter, more loving that never changes – and to know that not just in our heads but deep in our hearts – to know that the presence of God will sustain all of us in good times and in the bad as well. And isn't that one of the missions of the church – of our church! To help foster a relationship with God. And God is leading us! Savor that, rejoice in that, give thanks for that.

God has promised to be with us in at least 3 ways: as creator of our World. We know God in the saving action of Jesus Christ. And it is God the Spirit who enables us to respond in faith and join with others in Christian fellowship and then to go forth and make disciples.

We have all we need – thank God for that – we are so abundantly blessed. As we come together, let us be drawn in by the Spirit, to experience the mystery and know with joy in our hearts that God IS and lift up ourselves in praise and thanksgiving. Then let's go and make disciples.

And God said, this is good. Amen.

Prayer: We give you thanks, for all those who have passed on to our generation the story of your faithful, persistent, and loving call to each of us to know you. Be with us as we continue our faith journey – be with us as we share your story, as we live your story. You have blessed us, O God; move us to a deeper discipleship all the days of our lives. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.