

## June 4, 2023 - Trinity Sunday

When I read the scriptures for today my thoughts went a thousand different directions, like, the Sabbath is the pinnacle of creation, not humankind, or just how well we keep the first commandment – ‘be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,’ or how the wind from God that swept over the waters could also be accurately translated as either the breath of God, or the Spirit of God, or if it’s the Spirit of God that swept over the waters and the Word of God, which the apostle John relates to Jesus, called everything into being then the Trinity was present at the beginning, and this is Trinity Sunday. And that’s just the Old Testament lesson.

The epistle implores us to live in peace with one another and greet one another with an ‘holy kiss.’ I don’t even want to start thinking about what that would mean within the context of the sexual misconduct policies of the church. And the gospel lesson simply instructs us to go and teach all nations, and baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, with the assurance that God is with us, always. That would certainly make for a simpler introduction to an exploration of the holy trinity.

Add to that the question of whether to follow the wider church in celebrating Trinity Sunday; our denomination in celebrating Union – of the denomination, not Union Ontario – 98 btw; or the wider society and choose between Pride Sunday or Environment Sunday.

But I don’t imagine you want a rambling overview of scripture that would last several hours. I imagine you’d rather have me pick a direction and focus in on it. So how about the challenges that scripture poses?

At the annual spring meeting of ARWR, we heard a presentation by eco-theologian the Rev. Dr. Jessica Heatherington. Her concern is at the intersection of ecology and theology. She talked about the topic of climate change. With that in the back of my mind, when I read the old testament lesson I found these words challenging, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

It was the word 'subdue' that I found challenging. Subdue: to conquer and bring into subjection; to overpower by superior force; or even to reduce the intensity or vividness of (as in colour), to tone down. As a species, we have done an excellent job of doing just that: pillage and plunder the earth, violently even, for our own benefit. Here's the challenge: is that what God intended? Okay, I know, that's what it says in the Bible (Genesis 1:28), but did you know that there are two creation stories in the book of Genesis? There is the first one, that we just read, Genesis 1:1 to 2:4a, and then there is a second creation story Genesis 2:4b-23. In the second story, God creates Adam and put him in the garden to till and keep it.

Scholars believe that the first account of creation comes from one source and the second account comes from an entirely different source. The basis of this belief derives from the fact that two different Hebrew words are used for God – Elohim in the first, and Jahweh in the second. There are other differences too. The first account seems to set humanity apart from creation, places us above creation. Some have long believed that humans are the pinnacle of creation – the last thing that God created. Yet I seem to recall that there was a seventh day, a day that was created for humankind – the Sabbath. Would that not make the Sabbath the pinnacle of creation?

The second account of creation places Adam in the garden as its caretaker. Adam is a sort of Everyman. In this account, human purpose is to be in creation to tend and to keep the garden. In this account, humans are a part of creation, not above it. We are its caretakers, not pirates here to plunder it.

They are both in the Bible. The challenge is, which one do we believe? Which one do we live out? I would suggest that the solution to this conundrum is to look beyond the fine detail and look at the entirety of scripture, or, if you prefer, to look beyond the tree at the forest. What does the rest of scripture say about our place and meaning here? Are we born only for life in a hereafter and this is a waiting room? Or are we born for this life in this world?

The life and ministry of Jesus is one of care and service to the world's poor and marginalized. In fact, the most compelling line attributed to Jesus that I can think of that speaks to our place and meaning is from John's gospel, chapter 10, verse 10: "I came that they many have life and have it in abundance." Like no other text, this one sentence speaks to our place and purpose as being here, in and as a part of creation, and not to wait for what may lie beyond this life.

Rev. Heatherington talked about the importance of lament over the state of creation – something we are responsible for, of rediscovering our place in creation, and of working out how we are to respond to the current state of creation as disciples of Jesus. She talked of the connection between our relationship with creation and our relationship with the creator. She talked of the need to experience God in creation – to get out in the fields and forests, streams and lakes, to watch the sun rise or set or both, to look at the starry sky at night. She quoted theologian Sallie McFague who said that 'we will not care for what we do not know, and we cannot know what we do not experience.' We need to experience God in creation because if we do not experience God in creation we will not know God's creation and hence we will not care about or for God's creation, a creation that both accounts tell us we are a part of.

If correct, that we are created beings and are a part of creation and are here as stewards, to keep it on behalf of the creator, then that raises a second challenge – how do we live out our faith as disciples of Jesus. The first thing Rev. Heatherington suggests is to reshape our religious tradition in light of what we know of the functioning of the earth's ecosystems, rather than trying to understand the earth's ecosystems within the constructs of religion. Why does this matter? It matters because what we believe informs how we behave. Now there's a challenge – reshape our religious tradition.

But the challenge doesn't stop there. The challenge gets personal. The challenge is how do we, you and I, respond to God's calling. Our response, our action, is more important than right doctrine because discipleship goes beyond ethics. Jesus' ministry is about more than doing the right thing healing the sick and feeding the hungry. Jesus' ministry is about entering into

deep relationship with the other. And that holds up the hope and the promise of transformation – the transformation of ourselves, and the transformation of the other. Discipleship is about deep relationship. Discipleship is about transformation.

What is needed right now is the transformation of our relationship with creation. And, if you want a piece of irony, since we are created beings and part of creation, and since our purpose is to care for creation, then yes, we are our brother's keeper – we are responsible for caring for one another – be it those who are fleeing war and terror, or those who are fleeing drought or natural disaster, or those living on the street, or those living in the prison of addiction, or mental health issues, or, you get the picture.

I could go on, but I've gone on long enough and then some. If you are interested in hearing the entirety of Rev. Heatherington's presentation, let me know and I will send you the link. I guess I came down closest to Environment Sunday, rather than Trinity Sunday.

The challenge of scripture is what do we believe, how do we believe, how do we read it, how do we decipher it, how do we understand it? The challenge of scripture is also how do we then live as disciples of God? For me, part of the answer is to give up the burning of wood for sheer idle enjoyment when we go camping this summer. No campfire that is not necessary for survival. And that is barely even the tip of an iceberg in the response we need to make to the climate crisis.