

Trinity Sunday

The Rev. Beth Orling
June 4, 2023

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

Psalm 8

2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Matthew 28:16-20

Faith Episcopal Church, Poulsbo, WA.

2 Corinthians 13:13

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

The Gospel Matthew 28:16-20

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The Sermon

I loved taking my young grandchildren on meadow walks. In the Spring, little fuzz balls from cottonwood trees would drift down like snowy fluffs. Gusts of wind would carry them here and there. The children would love to run and try to catch the little seed pods. Always when they thought they had figured out how to catch one, a gust of wind would carry that little fuzz ball away in a direction they never expected. In their childish joy, they loved the surprises. I don't think they ever caught one.

Perhaps trying to catch the fuzz ball is like trying to explain God, trying to explain the Trinity. Not possible!

People have been trying for millennia to catch hold of the idea of God, but the concept of “God” is unimaginable. When I am asked to “explain God”, I use some kind of hand motions that indicate that I cannot even begin such a task. Hand motions that indicate wonder, humility, awe.

We try to explain that which cannot be explained! St. Patrick plucked a shamrock and described the Trinity to the Irish people by saying it was one leaf with three distinct parts.

When I was raising my children, they could have called me “birth-giver” or “household manager” or “wage-earner” – all true things – but they preferred to call me “Mom.” I preferred it too.

Jesus could have called “God” many things: Almighty One, Lord of All, Powerful Creator, Holying Spirit. But, as we are told by those who wrote down the Gospels, he preferred “Abba,” the “Daddy” form of Father.

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An old man was dying. His priest came to the bedside and asked, “Do you believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit?” The man rolled his eyes and said, “I’m dying and you ask me riddles?”

We could ask ourselves the same thing. The world in many forms is dying, and we try to puzzle out the name or names for God!

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A civilian first responder on 9/11/2001 said he was called by Allah to run into the burning building to help rescue survivors. As he ran in, a chaplain made the sign of the cross over him and blessed him in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Later, his injuries were cared for by a Jewish hospital.

GOD – the God greater than any religion -- was with the man. God was with him in the faith in which he grew up, in the blessing of the chaplain and in the care of the doctors and nurses – of many faiths – at the hospital.

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People have over the centuries tried to explain God by writing creeds. The Nicene Creed which we speak each week goes back to the year 325. It was written in Greek after great debate. We speak the Apostles' Creed at Baptisms and Confirmations. The Athanasian Creed, from the 6th century, includes these lines:

“The Father [is] incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible. The Father [is] eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternal but one eternal. Not three Gods, but one.”

So why have a creed? Some have suggested that these historical and long-accepted documents unite us with Christians throughout the world. Others say that tradition requires it; the Nicene Creed is in Book of Common Prayer in each Eucharist. Others say that we proclaim these words of faith to one another because we love one another, to encourage one another. Others say these creeds keep us from forgetting the basics. But just about every line of the creeds can offend someone.

We may choose to speak these credal words in solidarity with other Christians, especially with those who have gone before us. We may choose to understand the riddles as metaphors or as ways people came to try to explain the unexplainable, to put words around the mystery, to comfort themselves with certainties. We may choose to overlook what bothers or troubles us.

Good, even great, books about the creeds are available if you wish to read them. Study never hurts; we don't park our brains at the door when we come to worship. Creeds have their place in our church life, but they cannot explain the mystery of God's love and grace.

And that's the key: “God's love and grace.” We heard the long and incredibly beautiful story of Creation this morning: a way of acknowledging that God is above all and in all, a way of putting things that we cannot understand into worshipful words. This story does not challenge the theories of evolution or the big bang. This poetry does not negate science. Science and human reason are all part of the story of creation, a story that continues each day – despite all the ways people try to destroy it.

And so we fall in awe of the ongoing creativity that is God. We fall on our knees before this power, asking for help and for forgiveness for all that

threatens to destroy the natural world or the world of human community. And we take comfort from what we call the holying Spirit which forgives, sets free, and encourages us in godly living.

People have been trying since long before Jesus walked the earth to get a handle on things of the Spirit, to control the wind-blown fuzz ball if you will.

In an old New Yorker graphic which I cut out and saved, a mom is gazing at her sleeping child. The child has been asking difficult questions about God and the universe. Mom muses, “I believe that God is real, but we don’t know anywhere near as much about God as we pretend to.”¹

We sometimes say “he” when referring to God even though we know God is beyond gender. We sometimes exclaim, “Oh, my God!” when we aren’t praying. We are tempted to blame God for the miseries of the world. But perhaps our greatest mistake is to think we can explain the ways of God or comprehend God’s work in the world.

God HAS met our needs by offering us Jesus as an expression of holiness and forgiveness. Every day we can start over, have a new beginning, let go of our old life and take hold of the new.

Let us pray: God of the universe you desire intimacy with each of us: Abba, sweet Jesus our brother; and our Inspiration and Comfort.

“You Who Are Present, Beautiful Mystery, Lovable One,

I surrender my knowing. I do not even imagine you. I simply let you be.

I adore you without words, I trust you without comprehension,

I rejoice in you without fear.

Wholly Love, Holy Thou, I am yours.” (Steve Garnaas-Holmes) Amen.

¹ “Parent” as a Verb: Church,” Emily Flake, The New Yorker. September 19, 2018

