

Sermon on Genesis 1:1-2:4a, Matthew 28:16-20
Holy Trinity Sunday, June 11, 2017
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
By James Erlandson

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ, in the words of the Apostle Paul, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Because it is so warm and humid today, I will get right to the point. I will seek to be clear and concise in this sermon (if not brief), short and sweet, or maybe more accurately, “hot and spicy”. Being Holy Trinity Sunday, I will limit myself to three points.

Point number one is that God is the Creator of all things, God made all things on this earth good, and made us in God’s own image. These days when on the political scene debates the extremes of *religion versus science*, using the false argument pitting “Creationism versus Climate Change” – this is a very important point to emphasize in the Church! To say that we believe in a God who has made all things does not mean that we subscribe to a simple doctrine of “*creationism*”, claim that the earth is only 6,000 years old, take the book of Genesis literally, or call climate change a hoax! Being Christian people of faith does not cancel out human knowledge or deny what we learn from science. Indeed, some of the world’s greatest scientists have been Christian, Jew, Muslim, Buddhist, or other people of faith! Believing that God made us in God’s image, we believe that God gave us brains as well as brawn, that we have God to thank for our intellects and search for knowledge, and give God the glory when human beings come to a discovery through medical science or other discipline which saves lives, or can be used for the common good! So we must remember this, and speak up, when we hear some make religious claims to deny the learning that comes with science, and politicize the argument, to seek power. That is the devil’s work!

Because our awesome Creator has made all things, we praise God with thanksgiving. Today we sang *Many and Great are your works, O Lord*, a Dakota hymn of praise, a paraphrase of Psalm. 8. This psalm is one of my favorites, especially beloved when I am out in nature on a starry night, and reads as follows:

O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You whose glory is chanted above the heavens out of the mouths of infants and children; you have set up a fortress against your enemies, to silence the foe and avenger.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,

what are mere mortals that you should be mindful of them, human beings that you should care for them?

Yet you have made them little less than divine; with glory and honor you crown them. You have made them rule over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet:

All flocks and cattle, even the wild beasts of the field,

The birds of the air, the fish of the sea, and whatever passes along the paths of the sea.

O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

But knowing that we have been made in God's image, charged with having "dominion" over all creatures, we have a holy responsibility given by God to CARE FOR THE EARTH. This charge to be good stewards of the earth is too often lost in the desire to mine the minerals of the earth, destroy vegetation to build our cities, and exploit the riches of the earth's bounty in order to become rich. Our human "Fall" into sin, which commonly comes with the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter 3 (read during Lent), is not limited to the sin of seeking to be like God, or seeing sin in human nakedness. The Fall also includes our misunderstanding of the word "dominion" to give us an excuse to rape the earth without a thought to the consequences – like the extinction of animal species, loss of habitat, air pollution and now, that controversial result known as *climate change!* Let's always remember that the Christian doctrine of Creation teaches us to honor God's work in creation by caring for and preserving what God has created – *for our own good – for our own survival – as well as a matter of faith!*

So **point number two** is: we realize that WE HAVE MADE A MESS OF THINGS! Isn't that right? We have fallen short of God's call to care for the earth and for one another, so God sent God's only Son, Jesus, whom we call Christ, the Messiah, to save us from sin. Even when we rejected him, and put him to death on a cross, God raised him up from death to life. Jesus calls each one of us in baptism to follow him in the path which leads us all to new life – a second chance, so to speak. And when we die, we have his promise that on the last day we shall also be raised from the dead to life eternal. This gives us hope for the future no matter what happens, that despite our own sins and failures, our abandonment of God and neglect of our neighbors' need, we can confess our sins and be forgiven, for God will never abandon us!

Which brings us to **point number three**: Jesus has given you and me and all people of faith a great commission – to share the love that we have been given with others. Jesus calls us to "*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.*" How we do that today in a pluralistic world of many faiths, how to share God's love in Jesus Christ while we

also honor and respect the faith in God by different names that other people already may have, is another sermon for another day! But we know that we have this call to share God's love in Christ Jesus with others – and we do not have sufficient faith or strength to do it ourselves!

So the most important learning of this gospel passage today, the encouragement of the good news of Jesus in Matthew, is Jesus' words, "*And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*" Jesus wasn't only present in the world 2,000 years ago in Palestine with his disciples. Jesus isn't only present in his promise for the future, when he comes again. Jesus promised that he is with us today, and will be with us always, forever to the end!

This is the crucial ***point number three*** that comes with the gospel! When you are feeling alone, or abandoned by God, actually you are not alone – for *Jesus is with you*. Even when your life may seem to be falling apart around you, and you don't see any reason or cause for hope, *Jesus is with you* – although you may not see him or be aware of his presence at the time. When the events of this world bring so much violence, hate and distrust to people even in our own communities, and may make you feel isolated or afraid, *Jesus is with you!* When you are suffering from physical illness, mental depression or spiritual despair, *Jesus is with you*. You and I may not be aware of him, but this is his promise! And we can only comprehend this through faith! As Luther said, "*I cannot by my own understanding or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith.*" It is only through the POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT that you and I can trust in this God who has created us. So we pray for the Spirit also to give us faith in the promise of Jesus to come again and raise us from death to life. We also pray for the gift of *trust* in Jesus' promise that he is with us today, tomorrow, and always, on this journey of faith on earth!

And so as Paul wrote to the Corinthians in our second letter today: *Finally, brothers and sisters, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.*