

Scripture Readings and Sermon

June 7, 2020 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Genesis 1:1-2:4a (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

This reading is placed after Pentecost because it shows the power of the Holy Spirit to restore order to chaos and it expresses the Christian concept of the Trinity in the first three verses. The attribute of most often associated with the Father is the creative force of God. According to St. Augustine, the Father is "being" from which all things come into existence. Theologically the "Big Bang" is simply the Father having a thought. This "thought" is organized through the Holy Spirit (a wind or breath from God) and brought into physical reality through the spoken Word. It is only when the thought is spoken that it takes physical form (Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light). The Gospel of John begins with this understanding of the nature of Jesus. When that spoken Word is received in the mind of the hearer, it is then reorganized. Paul uses the phrases from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit to reflect this process. While the original "priestly" authors of Genesis did not have the doctrine of the "Trinity" in mind, they did group creation into two sets of three that parallel. The first set of light, sky, and earth parallel the second set of stars, birds, and animals/humanity. Note the use of humanity rather than "man" since this creation story does not separate the creation of male and female but rather "they" were made in God's image. The "imago Dei" or image of God is a major doctrine of Christianity. This doctrine affirms that all of creation was originally "very good" and it is only after the fall that the goodness of the image of God in humanity is corrupted. The restoration of this image is viewed as the main work of Jesus in defeating sin. Quite apart from the debate about creation, this reading is critical to understanding who we are and who God is and how that relationship was first established.

Commentary on Matthew 28:16–20 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

The Gospel of Matthew combines the story of the resurrection and the ascension into the last chapter. Before his ascension, located on a "mountain" in Galilee, Jesus gives what has been called the Great Commission. From the cliffs around the sea of Galilee, one can see not only down the Jordan river valley toward Jerusalem but east into the land of the "nations" or gentiles where Jesus healed the Gerasene demoniac. After affirming that Jesus has been given all authority (not the disciples) and that he would be with them always, Jesus sends them to "make disciples", "baptize", and "teaching". Power does not come from us but flows through us because Jesus is with us as long as we do the will of the Father (7:21). The term "apostle" literally means "sent" so it is at this point that the disciples become apostles. The first question when dealing with the Great Commission is what does it mean to "make disciples" or "discipleship". To be a disciple is simply to be a student. If we are to take seriously that Jesus is alive, then to make disciples is to introduce people to a living relationship with the Master and help nurture that relationship in whatever means possible. The second question is baptism which is reinterpreted throughout the gospels. The baptism of the Father as practiced by John is the baptism of repentance. The baptism of the Son is the baptism of forgiveness. And the baptism of the Holy Spirit is the baptism of enabling grace that empowers the believer to follow God's will. These baptisms mirror Jesus' ministry of repent (Father), believe (Son), the kingdom of God is at hand (Holy Spirit). Finally, "teaching them to obey" is teaching through word and deed how to love as God loved us in Jesus for this is the will of God revealed in Christ.

Commentary on 2 Corinthians 13:11–13 (Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#))

Following the Trinity theme, the scripture selection for Trinity Sunday ends with an example of Paul's Triune blessing at the end of his second letter to the Corinthians - love of the Father, grace of the Son, and communion of the Holy Spirit. Like John's letter, God is the source of love and therefore love

proceeds from the Father. This love is made manifest through the grace of Jesus who is both Lord (ruler) and Christ (anointed or chosen one of God). It is through grace in Christ that we experience the communion of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit brings the gift of peace into our lives. The idea of a "holy kiss" is sacramental. If a kiss is a visible sign of love between two people, than a "holy kiss" is what the Father did through the incarnation of Jesus for God so loved the world that we were given a visible sign of that love (John 3:16). The "God of love" who greeted us with "a holy kiss" in Christ offers us a life of "peace" with one another.

Sermon "Peace in the Midst of Chaos" (*Sermon Video*)

A year after beginning ministry, I was faced with preaching on the Sunday after September 11, 2001. While God's grace is always sufficient and God's goodness is undeniable, hearing this when our ears and our hearts are hardened by soul-racking sin is challenging at best. In this year of perfect vision, the sin of the world has become amazingly apparent. Our fear and distrust of our neighbor as well as our institutions has been revealed. A pandemic and then riots have revealed the truth of our sin, we do not love our neighbors as ourselves. We live in a chaos of self-centeredness and self-loathing. This darkness swirls all around us just as the void existed in the beginning. We need God's breath of peace to calm the waters and bring light to our world.

Finding God's peace in the midst of chaos is impossible without faith. There is a leap of faith that is required that this is God's creation and that God is ultimately in control. We may at times act like the wicked keepers of the vineyard and imagine that all we see is ours but we are merely caretakers of the owner's land. Giving up the illusion of dominance takes walking with Jesus and learning the path of humility. This is why Jesus' first command to the new "apostles" after reminding them that all authority had been given to Jesus, is to "make disciples". A disciple is a student of the living Jesus. It takes earnest prayer with the expectation of a response. It means that the scriptures are just written words but a living letter from one who is very much alive. This faith requires that we seek the original goodness and leave judgment up to God. This faith requires that we step out in love and not hate or fear for God is love. Finally, this faith requires that we act as if God has a plan that will be revealed it due time. For those of us who need a sense of control, this is the hardest but look at the story of creation. God made the dark/light, the sky, and the earth before making the stars, the birds, and the animals. God prepared a place before creating the inhabitants and God prepared all of it before creating humanity. God prepares before we are even brought into existence. That is the one we have faith in!

Faith leads to the inevitable conclusion that we have made a fine mess of creation. By pretending we are "god", see the "other" as evil, denying love to all, and pretending that we are the masters of our destiny, we have created a world of chaos where petty humans pretend that each is more righteous than the other. The truth - we have all fallen short of the glory of God and need the baptism of repentance. We need to submit to the Word and humbly ask for the baptism of forgiveness, that "holy kiss" that heals a wounded world with compassion and mercy. It is only then that we can enter into the communion of the holy spirit and be baptized with the fire of love. When all that creates chaos in our own life is burned away and the Truth of God reigns in our lives will peace be found. And, only when together as a society we humbly practice love to our neighbors as ourselves will injustice and inequality subside and peace be found. It is time to stop blaming each other for the sin that we all carry. Only when we truly love as Christ loved without malice or discrimination will we truly find salvation for our society.