

**A Sermon for Trinity Sunday 2008
at St. John's Church, Norwood Parish
18 May 2008**

Propers: Genesis 1.1-2.4a; 2Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:

First of all, I want to thank our trinity of readers for helping us hear the poetry in the Bible's first story of Creation in Genesis. Hearing the story read this way makes it easy to imagine how it began as an oral tradition, handed on from one generation to another: a story told perhaps around a fire; perhaps in the context of worship; a story shaped in response to the captivity in Babylon of Israel's people. In the chaos of that experience, in contrast to the Babylonian gods of chaos and of darkness, the story affirms the power of God to create order, to bring Creation into being out of the chaotic void and darkness. The story of the created order is told with its own rhythmic order: the repeated refrains -- "And it was so," and "God saw that it was good" building to the seventh day's "and indeed, it was very good;" these all add to the basic daily rhythm, "And there was evening, and there was morning the [first to sixth] day," building to the blessed rest on the seventh day.

Story-telling, truth-telling, just doesn't get any better than this. I love it! Not only for the story's beauty, I love it because I believe it is True. Yes, capital T, inerrently true. I set my heart on what this Creation story tells us about God as Creator of heaven and earth, who created everything and it was all good (corruption and sin come chapters later in the story), who created everything in orders of increasing complexity of plants and tress, of animals that swim and fly, that crawl, graze and run, until finally God creates humanity - collectively, male and female - equally in God's own image and likeness. I believe all this to be true.

But you may ask, what about the Big Bang theory, what about evolution, what about science? Don't you believe in them? No, I don't believe in them; I don't set my heart upon them. But I do think they are accurate. I think scientific explanations of the origin of life have an awesome beauty all their own. I don't mean to take anything away from the achievements and insights of science; and I'm not picking a fight between religion and science. Good science has a beauty which I think accords with the truth of scripture.

Nonetheless, there is a difference between believing and thinking, between heart knowledge (loving knowledge) and head knowledge. Confusing believing and thinking gets us into the whole fruitless controversy between Creationism and actual science. When asked what he thought of so-called 'Creation science,' the Archbishop of Canterbury replied that it is a "category mistake." "Creation

science” confuses the category of scientific thought with the witness of Scripture; they are different categories of knowing. The Creation stories (there are two in Genesis) answer the question of Who? and Why?, of meaning and purpose. Science, for all its amazing insight and beauty, answers the questions of How? and When?

Although there is a difference between thinking and believing, there is a connection. What we believe is important because belief shapes what we think. What does our collective behaviour tell us about what we actually believe about this Creation story? If we believe that God gave us dominion over all Creation to exploit and abuse it without regard for the well-being of all its creatures, we get the environmental mess in which we find ourselves. If however, we were to actually believe that we were given dominion – another word for lordship – over Creation to sustain and care for it just as our Lord has dominion – lordship – sustaining, caring and sacrificing for our well-being, then we might think that Creation’s well-being is our responsibility. Then, we might think about environmental health as essential to our own physical, and yes, even our spiritual health. Believing and thinking along these lines could help us become better stewards of Creation.

Today is about believing and thinking – about belief and thought that informs how we live our lives. Today is Trinity Sunday, the one Sunday in the Church’s year when we think about what we believe God’s very nature to be. Saint Anselm described theology as “faith seeking understanding.” The doctrine of the Trinity is the product of thoughtful reflection (and yes much regrettable violence) over hundreds of years – reflection on what God’s people experienced of the God on whom they set their hearts. In seeking to understand their faith in God, whom they experience as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the doctrine of the Trinity developed. You will not find the word “Trinity” anywhere in the Bible – except maybe in some editor’s annotations at the bottom of the page; but you will find the experience of the Trinity throughout the Bible.

Let us look at today’s readings: In Genesis, ancient Israel wrote of God the Creator whose active Word brought things into being and whose Spirit hovered as wind over the chaos and darkness, and breathed life into creatures of every order: Creator, Word and Spirit (in Hebrew, breath, wind and spirit are all the same word, *ruach*). In concluding his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul prayed for the church to share in his experience of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the “giftedness” of relationship with Jesus which led Paul to trust in God’s love for him, and the Spirit’s power keeping him in communion, in relationship, with God: Experience of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In these concluding verses from the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus charges his disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; Jesus draws

upon his own experience of the One whom he called *Abba*-Father, the One whom he heard call him "my Son," and whose Spirit sustained and empowered him for his ministry. Eventually, these experiences of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit coalesced into the doctrine of the Trinity in our Creeds, becoming part of the Tradition which has been handed down to us.

Today we recall our own experiences of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; we recall our own experiences of the grace of Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit; and we give thanks for them. We also give thanks for ways in which God the Holy Trinity is at work in our midst: inspiring our 14 Journey to Adulthood pilgrims, and one adult, to confirm their baptismal promises and receive the prayers and laying-on-of-hands at the Cathedral yesterday; sustaining and empowering our Church School Teachers (God love them - there's the persevering power of the Holy Spirit at work!) whom we will thank shortly; and loving our young people into the great variety of ministries which we will celebrate at this evening's Third Sunday Supper.

What we believe about God is important, because our believing provides the foundation for our thinking, and leads to how we choose to live our lives. Let us give thanks for the Holy Trinity who has called us to live in the grace, love and fellowship of God.

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