

Good Sunday morning from a partially sunny hill in Rockport.....

It's Trinity Sunday in the Christian tradition and calendar. "It occurs the first Sunday after Pentecost to honor the Holy Trinity – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Although the word "trinity" does not appear in Scripture, it is taught in Matthew 28:18-20 and 2 Corinthians 13:14 and many other biblical passages." (from an on line source)

Writer Madeleine L'Engle expressed it this way: "The Trinity proclaims a unity that in this fragmented world we desperately need. We are mortals who are male and female, and we need to know each other, love each other. The world gets daily more perilous. Our cities spawn crime. Terrorists are around every corner. Random acts of violence increase. Less understandable and less advertised is the sad fact that Christians are suspicious of other Christians. Don't we have all the central things – God, making; Christ, awaking; the Holy Spirit, blessing – in common?" (from an on line source) How much more prophetic can these words of L'Engle from years past be for us today?

And so this morning, I'm not thinking so much of the *doctrine* of the Trinity, as the *activity* of God, Jesus, and Spirit in the world – today – as the scourges of virus and racism rage near and far. Each of us has a role to play in confronting both of these curses. In confronting the virus, perhaps all some of us can do is wear a mask in public and do our best to follow CDC guidelines to prevent the spread of the virus, but those are important roles we can play. In confronting racism, we can speak against it. We can vote against it. We can begin to live, finally, as if we truly are brothers and sisters, no matter the color of our skin or any other defining fact of our bodies and lives.....

Blessings to all this Spring morn..... Susan

p.s. You will note the sermon below is not single-spaced! I had one of my readers tell me recently they liked the double-spacing of the sermon – made it easier to read! So, here below again, the sermon double-spaced!

p.p.s. Shortly (within an hour or two!) I will download this morning's scripture reading and sermon to my facebook page: [freerangepastor](#) for anyone who wants to tune in..... and I believe Margie is also downloading my sermon to Federated's Facebook page....

p.p.p.s. A few of you have taken me up on my offer to come chat with you in your yard or open garage, on your porch or deck, etc..... wearing one of my many masks, bringing my own libation, and carrying my own lawn chair.... and maybe bug net, too! Be in touch if you're interested – call me at 207-322-1948 or send me an e-mail to freerangepastor@gmail.com.....

**A simple online worship service for Sunday, June 7, 2020 – Trinity Sunday
as prepared by Rev. Dr. Susan Stonestreet
Pastor of the Federated Church of Thomaston**

Opening Prayer

Can we lift our voices in praise in the midst of all our challenges?
Yes, with the voice of light: shimmering in star skies and moonrise,
flooding bright with sunshine!
As we give thanks to God:
Mystery, Teacher, Revealer, Source, Life and Power,
let us worship God!

A Simple Prayer

Giver of light, companion in darkness,
be with all who journey in shadows:
who grieve death's coming, who yearn for hope's renewal,
who seek a way forward.
God of the sky above,
uphold all who feel as though life and the world are collapsing:
in anxiety, in fear, in conflicts raging around and within.
God of earth beneath,
ground us for the sake of growth, nurture all in that which brings forth good:
acts of peace and justice, deeds of compassion and love, hospitality to all in need.
God of sun and moon and stars,
may we rejoice in the marvels of creation:
mysteries that stretch our imaginations, beauties that fill our spirits,
for all we have experienced and for all that still awaits us.
God of every living creature,
may a deep and deepening appreciation for all life be renewed with us:
may we care for life as you care for life.
God in whose image we have been fashioned,
may we value the gift and responsibility of the environment around us:
delighting in relationship with you, reflecting your goodness.
God of Sabbath, we rest in you:
rest that is not an escape from the world,
but a means to enjoy it more fully enabling us to

serve with renewed energy, refreshed by Sabbath grace.
Amen.

* From *Seasons of the Spirit* for Sunday, June 19, 2011

A Reading of Scripture – Genesis 1:1-2:4

Here is Genesis 1:1 – 2:4 from the Jewish Publication Society’s English translation of the original Hebrew text:

When God began to create the heaven and the earth – the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—

God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.

God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.

God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water.” God made the expanse, and it separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse. And it was so. God called the expanse Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

God said, “Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering of waters He called Seas. And God saw that this was good.

And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that this was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times – the days and the years; and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth.” And it was so. God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars.

And God set them in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth, to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” God created the great sea monsters, and all the living creatures of every kind that creep, which the waters brought forth in swarms; and all the winged birds of every kind. And God saw that this was good. God blessed them, saying, “Be fertile and increase, fill the waters in

the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

God said, “Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts of every kind.” And it was so. God made wild beasts of every kind and cattle of every kind, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. And God saw that this was good.

And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.” And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”

God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food.” And it was so.

And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array. On the seventh day God finished the work which He had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work which He had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation which He had done.

A sermon based on Genesis 1:1-2:4 “In the beginning....”

Will you pray with me. God of all our beginnings and all our endings, help us to remember that you are the Creator and we are the created. Hold our hands while we walk the slender tightrope that joins biblical faith with intellectual and scientific inquiry. Hold our hands while we walk the slender tightrope of pandemic and human rights chaos in the wisest ways. Teach us how to learn with our hearts what is impossible for our heads to fathom. Encourage us to let go of our drive to control all things and one another and take up seats in your holy realm which knows no end and holds a place for each of us. Amen.

Every time I read from Genesis, the first book of the Bible, written between 3 and 5,000 years ago, I have to ask myself this question, “*Where* did the Bible come

from?” The first two verses of Genesis go like this, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” (Genesis 1:1-2)

If there was nothing – “a formless void” – in the beginning – I ask myself, how did anyone know to write this story down? There was nobody there but God, so the text says! It’s a question that can’t be answered, except by the fact that during the time of history in which Genesis was written, there were lots of “creation stories” floating around in various communities.

I guess we might say we humans have always had a desire to know where we came from “in the beginning.” Our lives are made up of stories and they begin, “in the beginning,” when there was only darkness – in the world, and inside the wombs in which each of us were formed. We hold many stories in our minds and hearts about our lives, our families, our backgrounds, and our experiences. People 3 to 5,000 years ago held many stories in their minds and hearts. The enduring ones survived. And the Bible is one of the most, if not the most enduring book of stories of all time.

Many people don’t realize there are two creation stories in the Bible about how humans came into the picture of life on this earth. The one most often cited is the second one in Genesis – about Eve, the first woman, being formed out of the rib of Adam, the first man. This occurs in Genesis 2:19-23. But the first story, the one I read this morning, says “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27) No mention of an Adam or an Eve. Just this – God created humankind in his image, male and female he created them. How can this be? Two entirely different tellings of how we came about! And they both appear in the first and second chapters of Genesis with equal emphasis. How come that’s the case?

Biblical scholars have pieced together the writing from that time and have concluded that two different writers or groups of writers wrote each of these passages of Genesis. One told the story of the creation of humans one way – man and woman created together, and the other told it another way – man first, and woman coming from man, from Adam’s rib. So who’s right? Who really knows how we came to be, male and female.... thinking human beings given the responsibility to take care of all of creation on behalf of God, who started the whole shebang?

Theologian and professor David Lose writes, “The Bible is a human book that God uses to achieve God’s divine purposes. The Bible captures the distinct confessions of faith of its many authors. To hear these confessions of faith, it’s important to pay attention to the details...”^[1] And, I would add, to remember that the details sometimes do not agree with one another – as in the creation stories and the coming to life of man and of woman.

The “sources” or writers of the Bible came from many different strains, different backgrounds, different times. While keeping that historical FACT in mind, exactly why the Bible came into being is a question we’ll never answer completely. But from the beginning of time, people have had experiences of the mystery of God they just couldn’t keep to themselves. They had to tell others about what they had witnessed of the holy and most sacred moments in their lives.

The Bible is a series or collection of those experiences, their “confessions of faith” that are not outside of reason, or opposed to reason, but beyond reason in ways we cannot understand literally, but only come to believe faithfully... Faith is not the *opposite* of reason, faith *imbues* reason with richness and depth and holiness it could not birth on its own....

Genesis *is* a book of firsts.... the telling of the birth of the world in which we continue to live and in which we hope to thrive. Yes, we could live without reading the Bible. Many people do go through life without ever cracking open its pages to see what it might hold for them. But most of us don’t want to live without the faith, the belief, that tells us there is “something more,” something beyond us that gives us guidance, comforts us and offers us new life even when we believe we are at the end of our human ropes. “In the beginning” there was God – the Bible tells us so – and we are living in a time in which we still need and want that holy presence in our lives.

At the moment we are living in a time of great upheaval, perhaps the greatest upheaval we’ve experienced in more than a hundred years – a pandemic caused by a vicious virus has overtaken millions of people around the world. Over one hundred thousand people in our country have died from it already. And most recently, a black man was killed unjustly and a renewed revolution seeking justice for all of us, not just the white ones among us, has begun.

Other pandemics have hit the world in centuries past. Vaccines have been discovered to blunt and wipe out their deadly fury. Vaccines will be developed to blunt and wipe out our current pandemic caused by a new and different virus.

But the renewed revolution seeking justice for all is different this time around. And that difference is its multicolored nature – not just black and brown skinned people are rising up alone, but white, black, and brown skinned people are marching arm in arm, not fist against fist.

As I was preparing this sermon I pulled out a sermon I delivered in 2008. In that year, the United Church of Christ called upon its preachers to talk about race. It was put to us to hold “sacred conversations about race” from our pulpits. I held that conversation in Lincolnville at United Christian Church with some anxiety, some hesitation, some eagerness and some exhilaration.

My anxiety stemmed from the fact that I don’t like to make waves. I want everybody to just get along. In seminary the aspect of my personality that kept rising to the surface of my clergy reviews was that I don’t like conflict in any form. I never saw conflict displayed at home while I was growing up. And I don’t like it now.

My hesitation stemmed from my concern that some of my parishioners in Lincolnville might have thought I was bringing politics into the pulpit, and I didn’t want that to be the case. But I didn’t let my hesitation get the better of me because racism isn’t about politics as usual, or presidential political campaigns, or the slinging of dis-factual sound bites across our many communication airways. Racism is about hatred, and prejudice, and treating people as if they are less worthy than us white folks are in the eyes of God. In 2008 and now, my call as an ordained minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ surpasses my hesitation.

My eagerness then and now stems from the fact that in both times I know I’m not doing this alone. Pastors around the country are preaching about solidarity with all the people in our pews and on the streets, not just us lily-white skinned people with white privileges we take for granted and don’t even know still exist in our American culture.

My exhilaration today comes from the whisper of the Spirit I hear in my ears and the rush of the holy wind that touches my skin, even though in this moment, I’m not physically perched in a pulpit, but reaching you via computer. I hear the prophet Isaiah proclaiming, “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; He has sent me as a herald of joy to the humble, to bind up the wounded of heart, to proclaim release to the captives, liberation to the imprisoned....” (Isaiah 61:1)

I come to you this day still with anxiety and hesitation in my head and heart, but with eagerness and exhilaration deep in what I hope is my color blind soul. I

come to you this day with the prayer of Paul to the people of Corinth on my lips, “Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.” (2 Corinthians 13:11)

Racism is still alive and well, or should I say sick, in our nation and around the world. It has been somewhat undercover for the decades since the 1960’s, but the covers have been thrown off now, in the death of a black man in Minneapolis, following several other deaths in recent months, and in the heat of political strife. Out of dastardly deeds and dangerous words *can come* the light of a new day for us all.

Our sacred history opens with the words of Genesis, “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27) And the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, “For as the earth brings forth her growth and a garden makes the seed shoot up, so the Lord God will make victory and renown shoot up in the presence of all the nations.” (Isaiah 61:11)

May it be so in these months and years to come, as it was in the beginning, “in the image of God he created them all.” We have work to do to erase the brutal reality of racism in our country and world. The simple question is this – will we do the work?

Let the people say, “Amen.”

To hold in our prayers this day.....

Please hold in your prayers all those affected by the coronavirus and the families of those who have died from the virus.... and all those affected, which should be every one of us, by the cruel and senseless death of George Floyd....

From our most recent bulletin and more....

Ann Foster, Carol Moss, Fred Bagnall, Harriet Williams, Julie Pollitt, Zeke Bryant, Sally Harjula, Elliot, Trish Perry, April DeVarney, Helmut Steger, John Flaherty, George Ng, Doug and BJ Thomson, Heather Van Buskirk, Muriel’s grandson Jared, and Jackie’s 92 year old friend Genevieve Micali.... *Please send me the names of those you would like for me to add to this list next Sunday!*

A Benediction *

Life is short, no matter the length of our days.

*We do not have much time to gladden the hearts
of those who make the way with us.
So be swift to love. Make haste to be kind.
And believe that God, the creator,
Jesus, the redeemer, and
the Holy Spirit, the sustainer,
will be with us no matter the length of our days.
Amen.*

*adapted from the words of Henri Auriel

**Readings from the RCL (Revised Common Lectionary)
for Sunday, June 14, 2020**

Genesis 18:1-15, (21:1-7); Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19;
Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:8, (09-23)

Words to ponder today.....

“In ancient times, the world was viewed as tracts of land held up from the surrounding waters by pillars. This was covered by a dome-shaped sky that separated the heavens from the earth. The orderly account in Genesis 1 reflects this understanding.... This foundational story is a theological affirmation, not a scientific explanation.”

~ from *Seasons of the Spirit* for Sunday, June 19, 2011

[1]David Lose, *Making Sense of Scripture, Leader Guide*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 2009, p. 35.