

Trinity Sunday

June 16, 2019

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Psalm 8

1 O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.

2 Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger.

3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;

4 what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

5 Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

6 You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,

7 all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

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

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

Genesis 1:24-2:3

24 And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." 27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

29 God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. 2And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. 3So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

This Sunday is Trinity Sunday. That might not mean a lot to you, but I love Trinity Sunday. I admit that some of the reason is the music. I love “Holy, Holy, Holy,” and “Come Thou Almighty King,” I think they are two of the great hymns of the church. But I also like Trinity Sunday because it tells us something about God. Now how many of you here understand the Trinity? How many of you understand how God can be three person but one God? How many of you really understand how God the Father is equal to God the Son is equal to God the Spirit? How many of us really understand the nature of God? Don't raise your hands because then I'd know that you were lying. Theologians have tried to find ways to understand and explain the nature of God for thousands of years and God is still a mystery. And that's as it should be. How could we, as finite creatures, understand the infinite Creator? It's an exercise in pride to even think that we could. But the doctrine of the Trinity teaches us something important. It has been said that all doctrine is experience first. To me that means that the doctrines, the teachings of the church, are attempts to explain what we have experienced in our encounters with God. The idea of the Trinity is the assertion that, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, there is only one God. “Father, Son and Holy Spirit mean that the mystery beyond us, the mystery among us, and the mystery within us are all the same mystery. Thus the Trinity is a way of saying something about us and the way we experience God.”¹ The Trinity is also a way of saying something about God and the way is within himself, ie., God does not need the Creation in order to have something to love because within himself love happens.

The story we read from Genesis tells us not only did God create all that is, but that God gave us a special part in the created order. We read about the sixth day of creation today, not just because that's the account of the creation of human beings, but we read the whole day. We read about the other

¹ Buechner, Frederick. *Wishful Thinking*, p. 93.

creatures that were created that day, the beasts of the field and the cattle and the cats and dogs and goats. We read the whole day because we sometimes only read the afternoon part, the part where God creates humanity in God's image and gives us dominion over everything else in creation. But what does that mean? If we read the whole day, that we are created along with all the other animals, it means that we are part of God's creation, not separate from it. But it also gives us special responsibility. When we are created in God's image, it means that we are to reflect who God is to the rest of creation. We are God's representatives. The Psalm that Ken read for us proclaims this same relationship.

Reflecting the language of being made in the image of God in Genesis 1:26-27, the psalmist proclaims that human beings, mere mortals that we are, are made a little less than divine (verse 5a). We bear God's image, or God's face, in the world. Like God our Lord, we are "crowned" with "glory and honor" (verse 5b). In other words, in our relationship to the world, we reflect the character of God as Sovereign. We are supposed to reflect God's character to the rest of creation, we are to be loving, and creative, and even give of ourselves for the benefit of the created order.

The story in Genesis says that God has given us "dominion" over God's created world, and put all things under our feet (verse 6). Language like that is previously used in scripture only to describe God, but now it is used to describe us. What does that mean? What does it mean that we have dominion? Are we in charge? Can we do with creation whatever we want? And it says that we have dominion over everything, from the domestic animals that share our labor to wild animals, birds, and sea creatures (verses 7-8). We are made to share in God's governance of the world, to serve as representatives of God's own dominion.

By the time we reach verse 9 in the psalm, the repetition of verse 1, we know more fully what it means to call God "Lord" and "Sovereign," and what it means to share in that sovereignty. The lordship of God is revealed precisely in God's care for us. If we are ruling or having dominion like God does, then

we need to act like God does for us. God provides for us, desires our good, and enables us to seek it. We reflect God's image in the proper governance of our fellow creatures.

Episcopal theologian Elizabeth Webb writes, "The world that is at our feet is not there for us to trample. It is there to receive our care, for us to provide for it, as a whole and in each part, and to seek creation's fulfillment. In the psalmist's understanding of sovereignty we can hear the echo of the description of the king of God's choosing in Deuteronomy 17. The king who serves in God's image keeps the covenant and observes God's law, not "exalting himself above other members of the community" (verses 18-20). In our dominion over creation, we are to remember the covenant and God's commands, and not seek our own good at the expense of the domestic and wild world.

The implications of this are, of course, are far-reaching. How to interpret humanity's proper governance over the rest of creation must go into assessing questions regarding ecology; food production, distribution, and consumption; medical and technological advancements; even the morality of puppy mills. To be human is to be responsible for our fellow creatures, and we must take that responsibility with the utmost seriousness."²

I've been thinking a lot about what this means, this responsibility and care for creation this Father's Day. Not just because we are focusing this year on Creation as a Creation Care Congregation in the Presbyterian Church, although that is part of it. And it's not just because my good wife has got it into her head that our yards can be turned into beautiful gardens rivaling anything that Adam and Eve saw in their Garden and so I've been moving and digging and planting and mulching with no end in sight, although that is part of it too. I've been thinking about what it means to be responsible for and to be loving to and to be deciding on the future of another of God's creatures. Many of you have been so kind to ask us about our dog, Persephone, our three year old Boxer. You know that she had surgery a couple of weeks ago to remove a growth in her colon. The biopsy results have turned out to be positive

² Webb, Elizabeth. *Commentary on Psalm 8*. *Workingpreacher.org*. June 15, 2014.

for lymphoma and so we have taken her to a veterinary oncologist to decide what to do about her cancer. We were told that even with chemotherapy (did you know they did chemo for dogs? I didn't) that we could only expect 6-12 months. We decided not to put her through that, but to do what we could to be responsible parents, to keep her comfortable and happy and just to love her until it was time to say goodbye. So we're loving her and loving the time we have with her. And I've been thinking that's what God calls us to do—to love the world that God has created and put us in to be good stewards of it. To love the time we have here and to make sure we are doing all we can to be caring and loving and to be responsible. When Jesus tells us that he is giving us a new commandment, to love one another, maybe he means more than just other human beings. What do you think? The Trinity proclaims that God is relationship within Godself, that God is all about loving relationships. And so are we.