

Genesis 1:1-2:4 Pastor Bill Uetricht Holy Trinity 6/11/17

At our Bible study on Thursday I asked the group what they thought the major message is that Christianity has given the world regarding us as human beings. I wondered what the primary image that Christianity has imprinted on our psyches for what being human is all about. In response, Rhonda Sweet said, “We are all a big hot mess!”

Yep, that has been a message that much of Christianity, especially over the last seven centuries or so, has imparted to many of us. Before God, we are sinners. We are “one hot mess.” And there’s truth to that. Our lives are very messy. Many of our relationships are broken. We’re violent. We make dumb choices. We’re preoccupied with ourselves. We spend much of our time justifying our lives and our actions. We’ve wounded the planet deeply, not knowing fully what our actions will mean for the future, for new generations. In some ways, we’re one big hot mess.

But that is not the first word spoken to us from the Bible about ourselves. The first word spoken to us, a word that takes us back to the beginning, a word found in the first chapter of the first book in the Bible, is nothing like that. The first word is discovered when God, the source of everything that is, on the sixth day of his drawn-out, but orderly creation process, says: “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.”

So, the story tells us, God created humankind (“Adam” is the word) in his image, in the image of God he created humanity; male and female he created them.”

The first word spoken about us is that we are created in the image of God. The first word is not that we are “one big hot mess.” The first word is that we as human beings, diversely created humans, both male and female—we are the way God is imaged in the world. You know

that Judaism strictly forbade making images of God. For Old Testament Jews, and for Muslims, as a matter of fact, God is too grand, too mysterious, too other to be imaged. The only way God is imaged is in human beings. We are created in the image of God.

Now that does not mean that we look like God. It means that we represent God. We are God's emissaries. We have status. Our Psalm for today, which comes out of the same kind of tradition that our first reading from Genesis does, claims that we are especially remembered in God's creation. The Psalmist says: "When I look at your heavens, the work of fingers, when I glance at the bigness, wonder, and glory of it all, I wonder, 'What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them. But you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.'" When you realize that there many millions and billions of galaxies and that the earth may be 4.5 billion years of age, don't you wonder about the significance of little old you and little old me?

But you have been made a little lower than God. And you have authority. The Psalm writer says that God has given human beings "dominion over the work of [their] hands. God has put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, beasts of the field, birds of the air, and fish of the sea." Like God, we have authority. Wow! We are no junk. What we are up to is no small matter.

That is the first word that is spoken to us in the Bible. Now yes, read a little further in the Bible, two chapters actually, and you will discover an honest appraisal of the human condition. It won't take long, and you will find out that we are "one big, hot mess." We can't keep our hands off of stuff that is not ours. We can't live within the boundaries that are established for us.

But before you go to that story, hear the first one: you are created in the image of God. You are in part the way that creation continues. Creation is not a once-upon-a-time event. I trust that you know that Genesis one is not a description of a historical happening. I personally believe that whoever wrote the first chapter of Genesis wanted to

communicate the on-going character of creation. I think that's why in part he or she used the notion of a full week. In Genesis two, the second creation story of the Bible, God creates everything in a flash, like that! But in the first story, it takes a while. Creation is a process. It's on-going. It's happening all the time. And guess what? You are a part of that process. To be created in the image of God is to be given creative powers, creative authority.

You are not some bump on a log. You parent children. You write and sing music. You engage in lively conversation. You write poetry. You quilt. You dream new dreams. You form and oversee non-profit groups—groups that are serving the community. You operate businesses that provide goods and services to the community. You teach children and adults. You paint. You draw. You sculpt. You garden. From the work of your hands and a little help from Mystery, vegetables and flowers come forth. You steward church congregations. You oversee ministries—ministries that bless people. You expand facilities, convinced that such an expansion will enable congregations like ours to be increasingly creative in the community. You are created in the image of God.

Today is a day in the church calendar when we particularly remember that the God that we are created in the image of is called Trinity. It's a concept that has triggered people to scratch their heads in wonderment. It has caused many to write big long books that few can understand. It's turned Christianity sometimes into an intellectual puzzle that we think we must impose upon other people and other religions. That's all too bad. For at the heart of the notion of the Trinity is this simple reality: even God is in relationship. God is not a go-it-alone God. God is not a self-made God. God rather enjoys relationship, which is why we can't talk about God apart from this little handle: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

To be created in the image of this God, then, is to focus on relationship as the primary means for your creative work. Relationship is what it means for you to be a part of God's on-going creation. You

are not meant to be go-it-alone folks. You are not self-made people. You are not islands in the stream. To do your best creative work is to be involved in the dynamic flow of relationship, creating new possibilities, tearing down old walls, opening yourselves up to people of all kinds and all backgrounds, making disciples of all nations, baptizing and teaching what the great rabbi, a vital part of the Trinity, what Jesus taught. Life is fundamentally about relationship. To be created in the image of the Triune God is to be created for relationship.

And the Trinity is perfect relatedness. It's interesting to note how the Bible depicts the persons of the Trinity in terms of their relationship to the other persons. Throughout the Bible you see how each member of the Trinity always seems to be deferring to the other. Jesus defers to the Father. The Spirit focuses our attention on the Christ. The Christ points us to the coming Spirit. The Father does his work through the wind of the Spirit and the life of Jesus. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are busy living into God's authority by getting out of the way, by pointing us beyond themselves to the others.

The primary reason that "one big hot mess" may be a right designation for us as human beings is because we have misinterpreted what our authority as human beings created in the image of God means. For many of us, authority has meant bossing people around. For many of us, authority over the land, the sea, the beasts, the animals has meant using those things for whatever we want. We've seen them as our possessions that serve our self-centered purposes. The consequence has been a warming earth that brings great challenges for us, especially the most fragile among us. But if we are created in the image of the Triune God, our authority is not the authority of control or power. Our authority is the authority of stewardship, of care-taking, of serving the world, the people, everything that we are in relationship with.

You know, at the heart of the experience with the Triune God, in fact the reason the church began talking about the Trinity in the first place, is a symbol of how this Triune God relates to the world. That

symbol, that sign is the cross of Jesus. There we see the vulnerable heart of God, what it means for God to be God. In relationship, God suffers. That is what the cross tells us. God's way of dealing with the world is not bossing it around, but sharing in its pain.

That is what you who are created in the image of God do: you share in the world's pain. You mirror the very heart of the Triune God. You do your creative work not by standing at a distance from life, from people, or from their struggles. You, created in the image and likeness of God, don't boss people around, trying to control them. You reflect the heart of Jesus, the vulnerable heart experienced at the cross. You enter life and relationship fully and humbly, seeking ways to serve others and to shoulder the pain of the world.

By the way, when you do this, I suspect that there will be a few less "hot messes."