

Trinity Sunday – Genesis 1:1-24a
St Andrew’s Episcopal Church - Sedona, AZ

Images of God’s Beloved Community

*Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image,
according to our likeness...”*

Some of you are probably wondering why, on Trinity Sunday, our first reading was from the very beginning of the Bible. How does the first creation story relate to the Church’s doctrine of the Trinity? Well, don’t worry; you can relax. I’m not going to try to explain the doctrine of the Trinity. Theologians have been trying to do that for centuries and even have gotten into a few arguments about orthodoxy and heresy. With all good intentions, Trinitarian doctrines grew out of the freshly inspired new apostles’ wrestling with how to share the Good News in ways that were relevant to the diverse contexts into which the Holy Spirit sent them. Even centuries later, the early patristics were exploring ways to communicate the mystery of the Holy Trinity in ways that inspired people to live and proclaim the Christian faith.

Within the mystery of our faith is the belief that we are created in the image of God; that we are equipped to be creative; and that we are empowered to be caretakers of one another as we rejoice in the goodness of all creation. The opening chapters of Genesis let us know who we are and whose we are – created by God, to be in relationship with God and with all that God creates. This is such an amazing reality that it almost seems too good

to be true. Perhaps in our 21st century mindset our wider culture has conditioned us to be skeptical or even jaded about things that appear to be too good to be true. But perhaps that is because we get distracted by the busyness of our world; we become overly influenced by our individualistic and addictively consumeristic culture; and we fall into the habit of living into “Our kingdom come and Our will be done” rather than living with faith into the mystery of God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And not only are there external pressures that conspire to disrupt our faith, but sometimes our inner life prompts us to question and doubt whether we deserve God’s immeasurable and unconditional love. But living into the mystery of our faith – having the stamina and resilience and courage and insight – is not for us to do on our own. The Good News is that God created us in God’s image; God loved us so much that God became human in Jesus Christ; and God promises to be with us always – in Spirit and in Truth. God does not intend for us to be alone in living and proclaiming the Good News, because God is a relational God. God desires to be in relationship with us. And God desires that we be in relationship with each other and all of creation. Whatever the circumstances, we live with faith that God is there with us no matter what.

The promise of God’s ongoing presence is not a promise to us as individuals. The promise of God’s abiding presence and love is for the sake of

God's beloved community. God is concerned about each and every one of us and God is concerned about all of us. We are created in God's image – the fullness of which we cannot know in this life. But from a Trinitarian perspective, the persons of our Triune God are as beautifully, simply, and elegantly interconnected as the Celtic cross on the front of our worship bulletins. This image of divine interconnectedness conveys relationship, and mutually beneficial nurturing and nourishment for the sake of Divine Love. Being made in the image of God, God desires that we be reflections of the Triune One in our present context. Being Apostles in our own time and place, we are guided by the Holy Spirit to reveal God's abiding love by how we act toward each other, and what we say to each other, and how we see and respond to the face of God in each other.

Seeing the image of God, the face of God, and the presence of God in each other is what God desires for God's beloved community. It is what our relational God desires particularly when we come face to face with someone, or a group of people, or a situation that challenges us to live into the Love Commandment. It was no accident that The Episcopal Church responded to our country's painful history of racial conflict by requiring its lay and clerical leaders to participate in anti-racism training. But the title of that directive, in itself, seemed to fuel the conflict and anxiety that already existed in our increasingly diverse racial and cultural communities. And that was more than

a decade before the Black Lives Matter movement and the numerous church groups that popped up to reflect on Michelle Alexander's provocative book, *The New Jim Crow*. Thankfully, the church's anti-racism training was reimagined and renamed to "Seeing the Face of God in Each Other." This was not only a renaming, but a recommitment to the theology that each of us is made in the image of God. In all of our diversity of race and culture and ability - we are made in the image of God and called to respond with mercy and loving kindness especially when circumstances blind us to our ultimate identity - the reflection of God's unconditional love in the world.

As much as we would like to be perfect images of God's love, we know that it is only through Christ's merciful goodness that the Holy Spirit guides us away from language and behaviors that blind us to the abundance of God's grace. It is words relating to "fairness" that trap us in the hardness of our hearts. It is thoughts of "deserving" that lead us on detours through the dangerous recesses of our minds. It is actions that communicate scarcity that scare us into silos of fear. God knows that these ways of being are part of who we can be; but these ways of being are not what God desires for us or for any part of God's beautifully interconnected creation. Because what happens to any of us happens to all of us. Just as each person of the Triune One emanates Love, reflects Love and is Love - each of us and all of us are called to live in unity with God and in harmony with all of God's creation.

During this green and growing season after Pentecost, Jesus is sending us out to proclaim the Good News through our lives in this congregation and with our various circles of community. Now is the season for us to reimagine our relationships with each other in this parish, in neighborhoods throughout the Verde Valley, and in our wider world. Now is the season for us to recognize anew the image of God in the rich diversity our various contexts and cultures. And now is the season for us to live our faith as Apostles as together we manifest God's beloved community, not on our own or for our own purposes; but for God's mission and God's purpose.

Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will equip us with compassion and courage, and guide our Acts as Apostles in ways that reflect the face of God, the image of God, the presence of God, and the activity of God in our world. As we participate in renewing the face of the earth, may the Holy Spirit reshape us and recreate us and redirect us towards God's mission of being in perfect relationship with all of God's beautifully interrelated and interconnected creation through the eternal grace of Jesus Christ.

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