

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
Trinity Sunday  
6/11/2017  
Genesis 1:1-2:4a / Psalm 8

***“Where do y’all come from?”*** This was my favorite question to ask campers who had come to Prince Gallitzin State Park for a summer stay in 1995. Hospitality was part of my job as summer chaplain there. Chaplains in the parks are supported by the PA Council of Churches, something very unique to the state of PA. We offered Sunday morning worship services, evening vespers, invited outside performing groups for inspiration and community, and I got to make friendly pastoral visits, going from site to site introducing myself to campers and getting to know them. I enjoyed hearing where they had come from, their stories of origin unfolding as I listened and learned about our camper guests.

Where do you come from? Where is your home? Who are your people? We all ask and answer these questions to tell the story of our own origin, and the story of the place and people that ground us in the world.

Today’s reading from Genesis 1 is a story of origins. It is about beginnings, the beginning of creation. It does not present scientific evidence or historical fact. It reaches beyond creationism or rationalism. This passage is a work of poetry, a hymn of praise and blessing. It is an affirmation of faith – meaning that it is a statement about who a particular people believed God is. This statement of faith was shared by a community of ancient people, hundreds of years before the Church’s Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds were hammered out. This affirmation of faith in Genesis 1 came from the lived experience of the Israelites, who at the time of its writing were exiles in Babylon, Temple and homeland gone. In these first words of the Bible, it is clear that humanity is not at the center of this story of beginnings. God is at the center - of all creation, the very center of everything that is.

Exiles and refugees, displaced from their routines, from the people and places that form, shape, and ground them, quickly succumb to amnesia, and can find themselves haunted by the questions – *Who are we? Where have we come from?* This creation story in Genesis springs from the Hebrew people’s communal memory of God. It was written down to keep their faith alive, their identity, to help remind them who they are and who it is that orders life, especially when that life is chaotic, circumstances are beyond control, the meaning of life has been stripped away, and any reason to go on living seems to hang in the balance.

So, the ancient story tellers start, ***“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth. . .”***

It all starts with God, the God of the Hebrew people, a god different from the other Near Eastern pagan gods in that strange and alien land of Babylon.

*“Where do we come from?”* they ask themselves. We come from a *God who makes new things*. The one, holy God is an artist, a Creator with unparalleled imagination. God created something new each day for six days. God was an innovator from the word “go”, calling forth beautiful and wondrous things that did not exist until God called them into being. Whether called from nothing or from a formless boiling chaos, God makes new things, new possibilities, new life – that “spring fresh from God’s word”.

*“Where do we come from?”* We come from a *God who sees*. Seven times in this creation narrative God pauses to reflect on the holy handiwork. *“God saw that the light was good.”* And after making earth and sky, *God saw that it was good*. The same positive assessment is spoken after creating land and plants; after sun, moon, and stars, *God saw that it was good*. After birds and fish; after animals and humans – *God saw that it was good*. And stepping back to survey it all at the end of the sixth day – *God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good*. This is not a God mass producing machinery, concerned ultimately about efficiency and productivity. God reflects, lingers after each day of creative work, and is in no hurry. Quality art takes time and effort! Like a musician thrilled to capture on paper the rising and falling notes of a lilting melody. Like a poet delighted to find just that right turn of phrase – God attends to every wing, every stream, every leaf, every child that comes into being. This is a God who is deeply invested in His creation. And like a gifted artist – there is keen, persistent, patient, observation. God enjoys this creative process! God notices and pays delighted attention to what has come forth from His own hand. It is not so much a moral or ethical condition that God declares to be “good”. It is the aesthetic appeal God sees. Loveliness and beauty are present, recognized and savored.

*“Where do we come from?”* the people in exile wonder. We come *from a world that was and is created good* no matter what circumstances may be at the moment. Before there is any mention of conversation between the woman, man and serpent, before they spot the fruit that is so appealing, before they assert resistance to the boundaries God has set for them, there is *original blessing*. Three times God pronounces blessings in this passage: blessing of the living creatures, of human creatures, and of the Sabbath. Unfortunately some religious traditions have so heavily emphasized human sin, disobedience, and the separation and distance between Creator and creation, that the truth of original blessing has been grossly overshadowed and lost. But how do you think things might be different in the world, if we reclaimed that the world’s “default

setting”, yours and my “default setting” is not evil, but radical, world-altering good, that we have been created good? I wonder if we might become more courageous, more creative, more imaginative? Would we live less prone to be overcome by anxiousness, fear, shame, and self-doubt about who we are as part of God’s goodness, God’s original blessing of the world?

*“Where do we come from?”* We come from the *hand of a God who masterfully holds in creative tension all* that makes for mystery and messiness. Things that seem diametrically opposed to each other – morning/evening; lightness/darkness; order/chaos; activity/rest. This is a God bigger than we can imagine, far beyond our ability to understand. A God who dreams of endless possibilities where we tend to see only limitation, impasse, and dead ends. This is a God who remains faithfully committed to every part of creation.

*“Where do we come from?”* We come from a God in whose image we are made, whose likeness we bear. God’s mark is imprinted on our very being. This is a very radical statement coming from the exiled people of Israel. The second of the Ten Commandments forbid having any physical representations (images) of God in worship, as other religions did. Images could quickly turn into idols. So this is revolutionary! There is only one way that God is imaged in the world, according to this creation story – God is imaged in humanness. Humankind is the only part of creation to reveal something about the reality of God. Being made in the image of God is to bear the mantle of power and responsibility. God’s expectation is that human beings will exercise power the way God does. We have been created in freedom with responsibility. This means creative use of power. Not coercive or tyrannical. This is not power over, not domination, but dominion – that is, power committed to caring for the rest of creation, seeing to its flourishing. It is not about exploitation and selfish gain, but attending to the well-being of every creature so that each can become fully what God intended it to be. It is possible to ignore or distort God’s image imprinted in us. But whether we acknowledge it or not, we are made to reflect something of God’s joy, God’s intentions, God’s goodness, love, beauty, and care. God and God’s creation are bound in a relationship that is assured, but at the same time is delicate and precarious because human beings can choose to abuse, neglect, or take that intimate partner relationship for granted.

*“Where do we come from?”* We come from a God who rests. Sabbath is the only thing in this creation story that God calls “holy”. Honoring the need for Sabbath does not come naturally to most of us. Much of the time we forget it or disregard it. Maybe we even fear it, and we certainly resist it. Our “always on” 24/7 world is not wired for Sabbath keeping. Yet if God rests after the six days’ labor of creation, it is the pinnacle

of hubris if we claim we need no rest from our work, can carry on without a break for recreation, refreshment, renewal. Old Testament scholar and author Walter Brueggeman has written a book worth our reading and studying that is prophetic, counter-cultural and deeply faithful titled *Sabbath as Resistance – saying No to the Culture of Now.*

*Where do we come from?* From awesome and holy beginnings, the best of beginnings. We come from a glorious Creator. We come from the loving heart of God.

This story of our beginning as human beings is an invitation to respond with both awe and action, both praise and practice.

Always in our worship we are given the opportunity to experience awe and offer our praise to God. You are invited this morning to take the next few moments to write on the slip of paper in your bulletin, naming one or more places or experiences in which you have felt and known the glory of God through creation. The slips will be collected and the names of these places and experiences will be read as prayers of thanksgiving before the concluding collect of today's Prayers of the People.

The second opportunity before us is to prayerfully reflect on our actions, our practices in relationship to care of creation. I would love to see a "green" ministry team develop here at Trinity that focuses on care of creation and helping us become a more active "green" church. I can imagine this team might help us all become more attentive to our patterns of consumption; help us measure our carbon footprint; challenge us to expand opportunities to reduce/reuse/recycle; lead us to engage in community gardening; to research and organize use of fair trade coffee and eliminating use of Styrofoam products and reducing use of plastic and some paper products. Perhaps a "green team" could develop a forum series open to the entire community focusing on care of the environment. (LARC Day of Dialogue last October was about this very concern.) These types of action steps are about taking seriously our role as faithful stewards, because we have been created as partners with God in caring for all that God has made. This is about praying by moving our feet and hands through action to reflect the loving heart of God. Because that is where we come from, that is our true home.

*\*Significant content of this sermon is taken from the lectionary essay "The Best of All Beginnings", written by Debi Thomas. The essay can be found on the webzine Journey with Jesus. June 15, 2014.*