

Genesis 1:1-2:3

A Wonderful Life

Psalm 8

June 4, 2023

The gospel reading for this day, the first Sunday in the time after Pentecost, some call it ordinary time, Trinity Sunday, is actually the last verses from the Gospel of Matthew. It is known as the Great Commission.

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

The gospel text is accompanied by the majestic hymn of praise which is the 8th Psalm, as well as *the poetic narrative of creation* in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis.

The question of the day is, “what is the nature of the world, and of life, and how as human beings do we understand ourselves in it? In the Lenten season just past, we took part in a study of Genesis that for us began in the 12th chapter, with the call of Abraham. We also studied the stories Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and his sons, their descent into Egypt.

What became clear is that the first eleven chapters of Genesis, which are very different from the other thirty-nine, are an essential part of the story. They present

the context in which human beings live, they present the situation of our lives.

It begins with Creation, and the account in the first chapter of Genesis is rich in theological ideas. Any one of which could serve as the topic of a sermon. They are best, however, taken together in terms of their combined affect. They are a part of the church’s teaching. Let me enumerate them;

1 - The first is the conviction that *God has created the universe.*

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” is the way Genesis begins. One notices the similarity with the Gospel of John, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . Through the Word, all things were made, without the Word, nothing was made that has been made. In the Word was life, and that life was the light of all humanity. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

Or in the words of the letter to the Hebrews, “by faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” The Bible begins with a broad statement that is not about religion or doctrine, *but life.*

2 - The second theological idea presents the creation as chaos and disorder, and is met by the phrase, “*Let there be light.*” Once again, in John light is associated

with life. Whenever the temptation arises to see life as chaos and darkness, the text assures us that part of God's creative act is to bring light into the darkness, and give order where there is no order.

3 - In a related aspect of the theology expressed in this poetic narrative, every description of the creation is accompanied by an affirmation of its goodness.

Material life is good.

This conviction stands in stark contrast to Greek philosophy, and some other religious ideas, that physical life is evil and must be escaped. The bible affirms the goodness of material life. It warns against the worship of the created order, which is idolatry, but claims that it is essentially good. Every person is called to be alive and be a part of the world's life.

4 - There is something distinct about humanity. One cannot overlook the description of *human beings as made in God's image*.

It is sometimes thought that the capacity for reason is the best expression of Imago Dei. If it were so, the greatest commandment would be right thinking and correct doctrine. Instead, the greatest commandment is to love, which means the best expression of Imago Dei is the capacity for relationship, an aspect of life that draws us together into community, and when neglected, threatens us.

5 - Image of God also reveals that God has given lordship, in some sense, to the human beings, over creation. This idea not only acknowledges some kind of pre-eminence for humanity among all the created beings, and affirms a connection to the divine, *but* is the foundation of human stewardship of creation, that is, humanity is responsible with its care.

6 - And then there is the Sabbath. After God had worked for six days, God rested. The idea is not that God was exhausted from a week's striving after sustenance and survival, but that there was a completeness, the work was done, something new had come forth.

The keeping of the Sabbath is meant to maintain the perspective that the created order is not God, and neither are we. Life is a gift. We are meant to cease work, long enough to take delight in God's work and think about these things.

So we have counted six theological themes in this one brilliantly constructed poetic narrative.

Creation
Order and Light
Goodness
Image of God
Stewardship
Sabbath

Taken together we have the beginnings of a philosophy to live by, which introduces who God is and what God

has done; who we are and what are our responsibilities. The passage itself doesn't give a helpful understanding of the nature of sin, the human failure to live up to the gift; that is left for the story in Genesis 3. The next part of the message of Genesis is that human beings have been chronically unfaithful, disobedient. The first chapter of the Bible presents a solid starting point.

Part of what it means to accept Christ is that we accept this theology. Not only the concept of sin, but also redemption in Christ is a part of the gospel story that creation begins.

The result is; praise, gratitude, that leads to reverence. It is a first step on a journey that results in sense of responsibility; and by God's mercy can result in a good conscience, healthy self-esteem, respect for others, love of neighbor, inner peace, undying hope.

God has called us to life. What a wonderful life it is! God has given us this world. What a wonderful world it is. We have been given much to consider for one Sunday. We begin with praise. We listen again to excerpts from the 8th psalm:

Let this be our prayer:

“Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
in the heavens. . . .

When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?
You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor. . . .
Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!”

Amen

Now let us arise together in the singing of, “How Great Thou Art.”

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