

Old Testament Lesson—Genesis 1:1-2:4a

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day. And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day. And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day. And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day. 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. 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. 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." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 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." 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. 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. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And 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. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

New Testament Lesson—2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

You know, there are lots of things people *think* are in the Bible that just aren't there. In fact, there's some stuff people *really believe* is in here—stuff they believe with all their heart—and some of it (most of it) isn't even *hinted* at anywhere in here.

Honestly, some of the utter nonsense people of faith are actually convinced is in this book just blows me away sometimes. Translations aside, I'm thinking, "Are we reading the same thing? Is there, like, a different Bible I'm not aware of?"

I often think there's got to be. Anyway, you're probably familiar with most if not all of these examples—these "Biblical" ideas. Allow me just to name off a few...

This ring a bell? "Cleanliness is next to godliness." What does that even mean? God loves people more that bathe regularly? That we're supposed to only surround ourselves with "good" people—with "pure" people—only "Christian" people lest we pollute our souls? If any of that's true, then Jesus clearly wasn't very godly, was he? Nope, you won't find that in Scripture, I'm afraid.

Oh, how about this one: You ever get the impression from Church folks that God seems to care more about what we do with our clothes off than we do with our clothes on? You know what I mean? Like—that God is, somehow, more invested in what we do behind intimate closed doors than how we interact with our neighbors and our community—than about whether we're actually taking steps toward justice and peace—than about whether we give a darn about the less fortunate?

Friends, I can tell you from my reading of the gospels that our sex lives barely even register on Jesus' radar. It's the truth, folks! Jesus *is*, however, very much concerned with injustice and ending oppression. He talks on and on about how we treat those different from us—about building God's kingdom—about grace and reconciliation—loving our enemies. Jesus tells us what he cares about!

Of course, I could go on all day listing misconceptions, Bible-isms taken out of context, and things so many of us firmly believe are found in here. But I won't do that. Instead, I'm going to throw out one more possible example and we can mull it over together...

Ok now...here's a really fun one...You ready?

Anyone ever heard of the Trinity? (Pause) Anyone ever seen the Trinity? (Pause)

Anyone ever read about the Trinity? (Pause) Anyone ever read about the Trinity in the Bible? (Pause) Wrong! No, you haven't! At least, not exactly, per se...

You see, this uniquely Christian idea of God as Three-in-One isn't something we find spelled out for us in Scripture, alas. The idea that God is three "Persons" somehow made of the same "substance" and that each of these "Persons" are equally God in and of themselves isn't really located in...this.

Unfortunately, neither Jesus nor Paul explains the Trinity. Who knows, maybe they were just lazy! Seriously, though, you won't find a "Trinity-chapter" in either testament. Alas, you're only going to find certain glimpses and echoes of our modern understanding of "one God in three Persons." And there's a good reason for this...

The truth is it took time for the early Church to "see" the Trinity reflected in Scripture. We, the Church, started to notice how often—how consistently God is spoken of in this threefold way—frequently, but not always as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Jesus does it. Paul does it. We saw it this morning, right, at the end of Second Corinthians: *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.*

But what I think is even more remarkable is that, as the Church started to grow and to develop deeper theologies, we began to find evidence of the Trinity scattered throughout the whole Bible—both the Old and New Testaments—even at the beginning of everything!

I wanted to read the story of Creation in Genesis today because it not only gives us a really cool picture of God but also gives us a beautiful image of the Trinity active and working together with one mind.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good.

Did you catch it—the Trinity at work? It's more subtle than what we see in the New Testament; but it's definitely there. You have to look and listen closely; but once you notice it, you can't un-notice it.

Of course, God the Creator is everywhere in Genesis—no debate about it. But what about God the Son, Jesus Christ, the Messiah? What about *the Word* as Christ is called elsewhere? And better yet: What about God the Holy Spirit? Don't worry; we're getting there...

Ask yourself this: "*How* does God create here in the beginning?" In other words, what does God *do* to bring things into existence? Listen again: *Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.*

There it is. God creates by *speaking*. Creation happens through God's *voice*—the *word* spoken. Light and land and sea and human beings come into this world by the Word of God. And as the opening of John's gospel reminds us: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* The Word is Christ Jesus, the Son of God.

Anytime God speaks, anytime the Word is present, so is Jesus Christ.

But (inquiring minds will ask) where's the Holy Spirit at Creation? Again, we have to pay close attention: *the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.*

A wind from God swept over the face of the waters. This one takes some detective work but it's worth it. We just celebrated Pentecost last Sunday, so perhaps you'll remember what one of our main symbols for the Holy Spirit is...Mhmm, you guessed it: wind!

The word for "wind" in Hebrew is *ruach*. But you can also translate it as "breath." And yes, it can also mean "spirit." So anytime the winds are moving in Scripture, anytime God's breath is blowing, so is the Holy Spirit.

From the very beginning, then, the Trinity's been at work. Since the foundations of the world, God the Father (our Creator), God the Son (our Redeemer), and God the Holy Spirit (our Sustainer) has been active. It's a lovely concept, right?

But let me ask the question, "So what?" In other words, why should we care that God is a Triune God, that God's a Trinity? What bearing does this have on our lives today? How does it affect what we do, how we interact with our neighbors? Does it even matter?

I don't expect us to solve the mysteries of the Trinity this morning. No one's yet to do that in a way that satisfies everyone, but I hope I can at least press upon you that, yes, it does matter. Why does it matter?

We worship one God in three Persons. This means there is relationship at the core of God's very being. God is Three-in-One—eternally co-mingling—a forever picture of depending on the other.

This means there is diversity at the center of who God is! God isn't just the Father, isn't just the Son, isn't just the Holy Spirit, but each of these all at once. God isn't just our Creator, isn't just our Redeemer, isn't just our Sustainer, but each of these all at once. Do you see how God's a living example of diversity?

Friends, the Trinity proclaims the importance of relationship, of unity, diversity, and mutual dependence. And remember (here's the kicker), we're made in the image of this God.

This means there is something about who God is—something about how we're made—that call us to community—something about who God is that teaches how much we need each other, right?

After all, God is relational—not just within Godself but with all of us. God exists as communion, as community, as fellowship. God exists as interdependence. And that's got to affect how we go about this world. It just has to!

Yes, there's something about God that inspires us to lean on each other, to bear one another's burdens, to rejoice with the rejoicing and to weep with those who're weeping.

This God, who embodies diversity and community is the One—the Three—that inspires us to seek community and create diversity. God calls us to become a community of creation. And God-willing, we'll be inspired to live in to that call.

You know, we've already dissected a few words today. I think it's a lot of fun. Here's a couple more if you'll indulge me...

That word, inspire, is interesting. We use it all the time, right? Inspire: it's related to "respire"—to breathe. Inspire, then, literally means to put breath into. God in-spires us. God puts breath into us.

We are inspired by God—given life, given breath, by our Creator. We *are* inspired, we're given life, so that we can be *with* each other, be there *for* one another, so we can breathe together.

So if "inspire" means to put breath into, what do you think "conspire" means? Hm? Conspire means "to breathe with." To breathe with...Friends, we are *inspired* by God so we can then *conspire* together, so we can breathe with each other. Is there a better image of community than that?

What a profound gift to be continually reminded of our human connectedness—of our familial humanity—to know by virtue of who God is that we are created *for* each other—to know that everyone on this earth (past, present, and future) is made in the image of God.

Friends: this is who God is. And if that's who God is—if that's the way God works, then we're made in the image of God whose identity inspires us to conspire—to work with and for each other—to create a community and a world worthy of being called "good" over and over again by God.

I'll leave you with this...Have you ever heard of *Ubuntu*? *Ubuntu*? It's kind of philosophy of how we interact with other people. It comes out of South Africa. "Ubuntu." And it literally translates to "I am because you are" or "I am because we are." Beautiful, right? We breathe the same air. My breath is your breath. We breathe together. We conspire.

I pray, during this season of Pentecost and beyond, that we would breathe in God's mercies to ourselves; and breathe out God's mercies to others.

Amen.