

Genesis 1:1-2:4

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.

The Trinity in Times of Trouble - June 7, 2020

Genesis 1:1-2:4

One of the most influential events of my young life took place April 5, 1968. I didn't realize it then, but it would go on to influence my life and choices from then on.

April 5, 1968, was the day after Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis. I was eight years old, in third grade. Obviously, growing up in the safe middle-class community of Monroeville, PA, I did not experience much of the injustice and hatred Dr. King fought in his ministry. My parents, as much as I can recall, did not really speak of him much. When we learned that he had been killed, however, I do recall my mother saying, "This is going to be bad."

How bad it would be we are all about to find out.

When I went to school the next day, an unusual sight greeted me in the classroom. My bus typically was one of the last to arrive so most of the kids were already there.

A group of girls was standing around one of our classmates. Her father was a police officer for the our local community. She was crying hysterically and the other girls were trying to comfort her.

Right before she left for school, she was told that her father probably wouldn't be home that night or for several days thereafter. Her dad had been mobilized to reinforce the Pittsburgh police downtown because everyone knew that riots were coming. As children, we didn't know much about rioting, but we had seen pictures of riots which had taken place in far away places like New York and Los Angeles the previous two years. We all knew that riots meant a lot of destruction, fires, and yes, killing.

My classmate, with a lot of justification, feared that her father was going to die and she'd never see him again. So she cried. She screamed.

But what affected me most was the complete isolation of another member our class. Another girl, but she was completely alone. She was alone because she was black.

I really didn't know her at all. I don't think I played on the playground or ate lunch with her. She was just a black girl, one of the only black students in the entire school.

My mother never said anything particularly racist about blacks. I think she was just highly suspicious and fearful of the unknown. There had been no black people in her life. She was well acquainted with prejudice, as the daughter of a Danish immigrant who was a rarity in the Polish and Italian neighborhoods of Pittsburgh. Her family eventually moved west, out of the city, to get away from it.

My father had served as an officer in the Navy during the Korean War so had a broader range of interactions with people of many backgrounds. As far as I can recall, he never displayed any negative feelings toward anyone based on their race or ethnicity.

So for me, an eight year old boy witnessing a group of crying white girls on one side of the classroom and an isolated, friendless black girl on the other side, I was totally confused about what to do. So, of course, I did nothing.

Shortly thereafter the teacher arrived and she escorted the police officer's daughter to the principal's office to calm her down. We continued with lessons as usual. No other mention was made of Dr. King.

At lunch and at recess, the black girl was alone.

I remember this incident with such clarity because as I got older and reflected on it, I realized more and more that I should have done something. But I didn't. After all, I was eight. I didn't know the girl at all. And, most importantly, I didn't know how my classmates would react even if I did do something — and that was the greatest unknown of all.

Yet the thoughts that flashed through my eight year old mind back then are the same ones that go through most of us today: I don't know them, It's not my fight, and What will others think?

As a pastor, I have spent my vocation looking at life through a theological lens. In other words, I'm trained to ask where God is in every situation.

The Bible establishes its particular worldview in the first few lines: this is going to be a story about the forces of order struggling with the forces of chaos. The opening of Genesis paints the picture:

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.

In other words, in the beginning was chaos, a "formless void" of nothingness. God created light and proclaimed it good. Light is order. Darkness is chaos. God separated light from darkness. Order was separated from chaos. Note that order did not eliminate chaos. From that moment forward, order and chaos existed concurrently.

The first chapter of Genesis shows God creating more and more order from chaos, yet chaos remains. The story culminates in the decision of the creation of human beings, God's ultimate achievement in bringing order from chaos. Only two chapters later do we read the story of temptation. While there are many ways to understand it, one way is to view it as humanity's rejection of the light and order represented by God in favor of darkness and chaos sometimes personified by Satan.

Since that time, humanity has existed precariously balanced between light and chaos and the Bible is the story of God's attempt to rescue humanity from chaos.

The story of the Old Testament, as we have been discussing in our bible study, is God's attempt to bring light into chaos by choosing one particular group of people, the Jews, to live their lives under the enlightened laws of God. Laws, however, are merely external. People follow them more because they feel they have to. We don't internalize them to believe the following the law is to everyone's

advantage, brining all of creation back into full relationship with God. So we continue to believe to this day.

This is not to say God's project with the Jews was a complete failure. On the contrary, the Jews created a society that from a social and moral standpoint came closer than any other in trying to live the world God intended. Jewish laws and principles had an impact on the ancient world just as they do today. God's Jewish "experiment," for want of a better term, succeeded remarkably well in trying to rescue order from chaos. But laws, for all the value they offer society, can only go so far when then are understood as existing primarily to restrain us instead of building us up.

Therefore, in terms of Christian theology, God took a new approach by making the law totally personal in the man named Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus, in the Christian view, is the perfect human being because Jesus' life and ministry was all about rescuing order from chaos. Every teaching, healing, and interaction represented an effort to demonstrate the power and beauty of creation and order over chaos and destruction. Only a perfect human being could do this.

One of Jesus' favorite declarations when healing people was to say, "Your sins are forgiven you." Many back then objected to his making such a declaration because they saw sin exclusively in terms of illegal human behaviors directed at each other and God. But Jesus did not see sin that way. For Jesus sin is the pervasive force of chaos disrupting God's beautiful created order. When Jesus forgave sin, he was driving the forces of chaos out of those he healed, bringing them closer to God's original plan of order and light.

Jesus, therefore is the literal embodiment of the Genesis light and therefore was present with God at the creation. It therefore follows that Jesus, representing perfection, order, and light, was bound to be attacked, derided and eventually killed by the same forces of failing, chaos, and darkness that continue to plague humanity since human beings made that symbolic choice between light and darkness (a devastating choice we still make daily).

Christians believe that the reality of the resurrection of Jesus is God's asserting the supremacy and ultimate victory of the light of order over the darkness of chaos. The light has not completely conquered the darkness, but Jesus' resurrection points to the time when it will.

The last chapter of the book of Revelation proclaims God's final triumph over chaos and darkness: And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever. (22:5)

Seen through the Christian lens, the events of these past days make perfect sense. On one level we see the irrational destruction of property and life responding to the equally irrational murder of one human being.

This is no different from the irrational response of the rioters in 1968 responding to the equally irrational assassination of Dr. King. Chaos is very much part of the created world of light intended by God. The rationality represented by God's order struggles daily against the forces of irrationality, darkness and chaos.

And this leads me back to my eight year old self who did not get involved. But I was then and remain now merely representative of the vast majority of humanity which does not get involved.

We marvel at the irrational behavior of the rioters. "Why are they doing this?" "What good is served in the destruction and vandalism?" "How can they make their message of injustice clear when they themselves are committing such unjust acts?"

And such questions seem reasonable, seem rational. Those committing the acts are irrational, we who ask the questions are rational. They represent darkness and chaos. We believe ourselves to be representing light and order.

But this is the fundamental problem: We cannot portray ourselves as children of light and order appalled at the forces of darkness and chaos in our midst. We cannot merely wring our hands and bemoan the destruction.

One way forward is found in the profound truth of this day, this Trinity Sunday. In the very first words of Genesis we see the Trinity in action. God creating, Christ enlightening, the Spirit moving.

More than anything else, the Holy Trinity represents the idea of community in action.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Or Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. Or Mother, Child, Breath of God. Our limited human understanding of God reduces us to using words to describe the indescribable.

However, what we can understand is that the Trinity, no matter what we call it is about a perfect relationship. The nature of God is a perfect relationship which is God's intention for all creation.

Celebrating Trinity Sunday is about celebrating the centrality and necessity of relationships, whether they be spiritual or human.

If God is a relationship of three, we who are created by God are made to live in relationship with one another. The existence of the Trinity reminds us that we are called, always called, to seek relationship with each other, celebrating both our similarities and differences.

What we must do in the weeks and months and years ahead is to seek to build genuine relationships with each other, regardless of the outward appearances we have so often used to separate ourselves. Inside each of us is a living spirit that unites us and cannot be divided. Let us overcome our divisions by seeking and finding and rejoicing in the spirit that dwells in us all.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.