**Weekend of Sunday, June 4, 2023**

**1st Sunday after Pentecost/Lectionary X/Year A**

**First Reading: Genesis 1:1-2:4a**

**Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 13:11-13**

**Gospel Reading: Matthew 28:16-20**

**Sermon Title: *“The Heart of the Faith”***

**Theme**

*Though the word* trinity *is not found in the scriptures, today’s second reading includes the apostolic greeting that begins the liturgy: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. In the gospel Jesus sends his disciples forth to baptize in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. More than a doctrine, the Trinity expresses the heart of our faith: we have experienced the God of creation made known in Jesus Christ and with us always through the Holy Spirit. We celebrate the mystery of the Holy Trinity in word and sacrament, as we profess the creed, and as we are sent into the world to bear witness to our faith.*

**Texts:**

**First Reading: Genesis 1:1--2:4a**

*At the beginning of time, God the Creator, God the powerful Word, and God the life-giving Spirit form the earth and all its inhabitants. God sees that all this created work is good and then rests on the seventh day.*

1In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 2the 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. 3Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. 4And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.
 6And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” 7So 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. 8God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.
 9And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. 10God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. 11Then 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. 12The 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. 13And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.
 14And 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, 15and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. 16God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. 17God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, 18to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.
 20And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” 21So 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. 22God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” 23And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.
 24And 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. 25God 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.
 26Then 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.”
 27So God created humankind in his image,
  in the image of God he created them;
  male and female he created them.
28God 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.” 29God 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. 30And 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. 31God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.
 2:1Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. 2And 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. 3So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.
 4aThese are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

**Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 13:11-13**

*Paul closes a challenging letter to the Corinthians with an appeal to Christian fellowship grounded in the triune harmony of Christ’s grace, God’s love, and the Spirit’s partnership.*

[Paul writes:] 11Finally, 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. 12Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.
 13The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

**Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20**

*After his resurrection, Jesus summons his remaining disciples and commissions them to baptize and teach all nations in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

16Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

**Sermon**

Today goes by another name. "The Holy Trinity." The word, "Trinity" is not found anywhere in scripture, however, the concept shows up in all three readings prescribed for today. Trinity is a word that theologians made up to describe how God has made God's self known to humankind. And, as my sermon title indicates, I think the Trinity is how God makes God's self known to us and is therefore at "the Heart of Faith."

From what I read, the first application of the title, "Trinity" was made in about 200 CE. I've sometimes wondered how God feels about humankind making up a name for him. But if we would have read Genesis just a little further, we would have found this:

19So out of the ground the Lord GOD formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

So I have concluded that God probably doesn't mind being named the Trinity. As I've said before, God is jealous for our attention, so the fact that humankind came up with a name for God probably does please God.

In the First Reading from Genesis, we have one of the creation stories. Yes, there are two. The second story begins where this one ends and is where the people, Adam and Eve, show up, though they are not named until chapters three and four, but I digress.

In the story of Genesis, we are reminded that God is the prime mover, a concept developed by Aristotle. What he meant is that there had to be something or someone that initiated everything. Thomas Aquinas applied this concept to the God of Christianity.

In the Genesis 1 story, we witness the power of God's word in bringing forth the universe, the heavens, the earth, and all living creatures. Notice again please: God spoke creation into happening. God, the prime mover, is so powerful that God's word alone created the universe. In creation, God establishes the order of life itself.

God formed humankind in his image, whatever that means, infuses us with his breath, and commands us to care for his creation. That is the first and most important command God gives us – take care of God's creation. How are we doing with that? I watch the news coverage of Putin's war against Ukraine and how Ukraine is being made into an uninhabitable wasteland and I have to say, not very well. So God is the prime mover of creation and each one of us, every individual, carries the divine spark within, a reflection of God's own creativity.

Yet, despite this divine origin, we often find ourselves wandering, lost in the complexities of life, doubting our purpose, and questioning our worth. I can't tell you how many times people have come to me saying, "If I just knew what God wanted me to do, I would do it." This is where the words of Paul to the ornery Corinthians resonate deeply. Paul urges us to examine ourselves, test our faith, and seek transformation. It is through self-reflection and introspection that we grow, allowing God's grace to work within us. And more specifically, we discover that God seems to be less concerned with *what we do* than *who we are*. And who we are is God's creation, created in God's image. Therefore we ought to agree with one another and live in peace. Paul concludes this passage and the letter with what we know as the Apostolic Greeting. It is spoken to us so often that we don't hear it. So let's parse it out:

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ* is that while we were yet sinners, he went to the cross to die in our place.

*the love of God* is that we were first created out of love, and then out of God's love through Christ the Son, we were saved out of love for eternity.

*and the communion of the Holy Spirit* is that which abides with us and draws us together into community. God reveals God's self to us as the divine community, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and it is God's will that we live together in community in peace and love.

I think this Apostolic Greeting also tells us a lot about the Heart of our Faith.

But wait, there's more. According to the Gospel Reading from Matthew, Jesus's ministry, passion, and resurrection are complete. But before he leaves them he gave his disciples, now apostles, marching orders. We call this passage the Great Commission because this is where Jesus sends them out with clear direction, empowering his followers to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Clearly, the use of the Trinitarian formulas is what attracted the lectionary editors to this passage. But more importantly to my purpose, included in the Heart of the Faith, is the commandment to share what we have been given, with others so they might also come to faith.

We are called to be Christ's ambassadors, spreading the good news of redemption, forgiveness, and eternal life. We are entrusted with the task of sharing the transformative power of God's love with all we encounter, for it is through our words, actions, and deeds that the Kingdom of God expands. We are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus in a broken world, bringing healing, reconciliation, and hope to those in need.

As we meditate on these passages, let us be reminded of our divine origin and purpose. Let us embrace the invitation to examine ourselves and grow in faith. Let us accept the responsibility of the Great Commission, knowing that we are never alone, for Jesus promises to be with us always, to the very end of the age.

May the story of creation, the call to self-reflection, and the Great Commission inspire us to live lives that honor God, reflecting His love, grace, and mercy to all. May we become instruments of transformation and agents of reconciliation in a world hungering for truth and salvation.

**Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

So today, this First Sunday after Pentecost, The Holy Trinity, we pause to consider just what is at the heart of our faith. We ought to know what we worship. Great theologians and philosophers have written lengthy dissertations on the subject, but I don't think it has to be that difficult, and today is a great day to take the time to make it easy. God in God's wisdom, is content to be known through the person of Jesus. To know Jesus is enough.

**Prayer**

God of heaven and earth, before the foundation of the universe and the beginning of time you are the triune God: Author of creation, eternal Word of salvation, life-giving Spirit of wisdom. Guide us to all truth by your Spirit, that we may proclaim all that Christ has revealed and rejoice in the glory he shares with us. Glory and praise to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen