

Genesis 1:1-2:4b Pastor Bill Uetricht Holy Trinity 6/19/11

A portion of Vivaldi's "Spring" was played, accompanied with pictures that matched the spirit of the music.

Sometimes it takes music, grand music, to express human emotions, to reflect on the depths of what it means to be a human being.

Back before the first invention of breathing,
Way back when,
Back before the invention of the future,
Back before the circle possessed a circumference,
Before the line knew the intimacy of the edge,
Way back in the when of now
God enforced creation. (Hugh Cook)

Sometimes it takes poetry to express the grandeur of the creation, the mystery of beginnings.

"It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all paces give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, for the glorious resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ, the true paschal lamb who gave himself to take away our sin, who in dying has destroyed death, and in rising has brought us to eternal life. And so with Mary Magdalene and Peter and all the witnesses of the resurrection, with earth and sea and all their creatures, with angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, we praise your name and join their unending hymn."

Sometimes it takes liturgy to capture the depths of human praise, the heights of the mystery of God. Sometimes it takes liturgical language to provide order to what truly is beyond all human ordering.

This past week as I was preparing for this sermon, I happened upon this question that Dan Clendenin had posed: "Who would want a world reduced to the equations of chemistry and devoid of the beauty of

a symphony?” Who would want a world that can be explained by the theories of biology or mathematics but would be lacking in mystery or wonder? Who would want a world in which the deepest things about life were thought to be a matter of facts and figures, not a matter of beauty and awe? Who would want a world that could be rationally explained but not emotionally or spiritually touched? Who would want a world that lacked an encounter with the grand, the massive, the unfathomable, the sacred, the holy?

I wouldn't want such a world, and nor does the Bible want such a world. Nor does the Bible believe in such a world. Oh, this is not to say that the Bible is anti-science, that it wouldn't make room for the rational, the reasonable, the objective, the dependable, the provable. In many ways, those things are just not its concern. The Bible is in no way a science book. It doesn't pretend to be. And it is misused if it is claimed to be. The Bible is a book of faith intended to invite people into the imagination of faith. And to do so it sometimes plays a symphony, writes a poem, presents a liturgy.

All of which is what we have in the first lesson from Genesis. This marvelous first chapter of the entire Bible is not science. This is not a chapter that should create battles between creationists and evolutionists. This is not a text that should turn Christians into laughing stocks who claim that the world is only six thousand years old and never had dinosaurs. What we have in Genesis one and the first part of Genesis two is a grand symphony. It's great poetry, phenomenal liturgy. Actually, there are those who think that this text may have been used by Israel in its worship (liturgical) life. It follows such a dependable pattern: And God said . . . and God saw that it was good. There was evening and morning, the [whatever] day. These words are repeated over and over again. The repetition probably enabled people to participate in them in a worship setting, one of the reasons, by the way,

for the use of liturgical language. Such language allows for participation.

If this text is not science then—if it is poetry and liturgy—what is it trying to communicate? What is this symphony evoking? Without a doubt, what we have in this first word from Genesis is a message that makes it clear that life cannot be reduced to the equations of chemistry. Life is not simply a matter of facts and figures. The message is that life is fundamentally given. It comes not from us. We are not responsible for creating it or making it happen. A word from beyond us brings it into being. And this word is an ordering word. Although very often it may not appear to us to be true, especially as we deal with life's messiness, order marks the world as it is brought into being by the One who speaks it into existence. That is to say, life at its deepest is not chaotic.

It is interesting to note that this passage from Genesis was likely brought into its final form during one of Israel's most chaotic times—the period when Babylon overcame this nation, destroyed its temple and its holy city. The people of Israel at this time were wondering if indeed life had any order, if their status as a special people were more than an accidental blip on the radar screen of human history. The author/editor of Genesis insists that it was and that what they were experiencing at the hands of their oppressors is not the final word about their life together. Their status comes from God, not their current situation. And there is an order to life and that order is established by God, not by the people who appear to be running the show, the people who are hurting them.

The symphony playing today, the poetry and liturgy being read and sung today is a masterpiece that invites us to see life as fundamentally given and shaped by God, a reality that invites us into Sabbath, into rest. The climax of our first lesson for today is not the creation of human beings, as one might expect. No the climax is to be found on the seventh

day when God rests from all that he has done. Life that is given, life that is ordered by God is life that invites us into rest. Even in the big job of creation, God rests. We, too, can rest. We, too, can relax. The symphony, poetry and liturgy of Genesis one and two—they all invite our anxious souls that are plagued by the disorder of life into rest. Life at its depths is not about us. Life from its beginnings has not been about us. What an invitation to breathe out, to breathe in, to let go, to let God be God!

Today is Trinity Sunday. It is also Father's Day. The idea of the Trinity seems to beckon us into elaborate theological gymnastics through which we try to understand God as being three and one at the same time. It is the kind of day that seems to invite us into the equations not so much of chemistry, but of theology. It seems to be a day for deep rational thought. And Father's Day, since it focuses on men, also seems to be a day when rationalism should prevail. Aren't men often characterized by their emphasis on rationality?

Well, yes, the notion of the Trinity does stretch the mind. And, yes, many men do seem to be focused on rational things, on what the mind rather than what the heart can perceive. Yet still, I wonder if the right spirit for the day isn't the symphony, poetry, and liturgy? Maybe the Trinity—God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is not so much a mathematical equation to figure out, but a marvel to get lost in, something beautiful that evokes poetry, music, maybe even a symphony. The Trinity tells us that God in God's very depths is relational. God is not a lone ranger. To speak of our God is to speak of One who is in constant relationship, who brings order out of chaos not through rules or scientific theories but through relationship. What a wonder to behold!

And maybe, just maybe, herein lies a key for what good fathering is all about. Maybe good fathering is more of an art than a science. Maybe good fathering is not a matter of following all the rules of

fathering, fulfilling the neatly described lists that the scientists of fathering propose. Maybe good fathering is primarily about getting lost in the wonder of it all, being struck by the awe, the sheer givenness of being a dad. Maybe good fathering is not about meeting a long list of goals and objectives, but a wonder to behold, a relationship to enter into fully.

I've said before, and I'll say it again. I think I understood my role of fathering the best when the doctor handed me Micah after he and Bev worked really hard to bring him into the world. I understood my role of fathering best when the nurses handed Bev and me Jacob after he had been born and we were ready to take him home. Both times deep in my spirit I said "Wow!" What a honor! What a gift! What a wonder to behold! And I am privileged to be in relationship with both of them! Somebody ought to write some poetry! Somebody ought to be speak words of liturgical praise! Somebody ought to play a symphony."

("Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's ninth symphony was played.)