

Sermon Preached by the Rev. Thomas P. O'Dell
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June 11, 2017 – Trinity Sunday, Year A

Lectionary Readings for Trinity Sunday, Year A
Genesis 1:1-2:4a, Psalm 8, 2 Corinthians 13:11-13, Matthew 28:16-20

I speak to you in the Name of the Holy Trinity, one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“It’s the economy, stupid.” A generation ago, these words became a famous internal reminder in a political campaign. They were intended to keep the candidate and his surrogates focused on the central message without getting distracted by a welter of complexities.

Today is Trinity Sunday, the only day in the Church year that is named after a doctrine of the Church. Talk about the Holy Trinity can get real complicated, real fast. Consider this handy-dandy, clear-cut explanation of the Holy Trinity that appears in our very own *Book of Common Prayer*:

We worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.

I don't think that this is going to cut it for us! It may be theologically correct, but what does it mean? What does it mean for us? What does it mean for us in the living of our real-life lives?

When it comes to our efforts to make sense of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity, we can easily become distracted — lost in the weeds of theological inquiry.

We’re like the people in that long-ago political campaign. We need something to keep us focused on what really matters.

I suggest that there is a shorthand slogan that we can use to keep ourselves centered on what this day is really all about. So forgive me for putting it this way, but the slogan I propose goes like this:

“It’s the relationships, stupid!”

The context of those relationships are set out in the Creation account in Genesis. Let’s look at two of them:

1. Our relationship with God
2. Our relationship with Creation

What is our relationship with God? It’s special. Actually, that’s a gross understatement! It’s exalted! Of everything else in all creation, only us — only humans — are created in the

image of God. It's a cause of great wonder, the exalted status of love that God has given us. In the Psalm we shared today, the psalmist wondered:

What is man that you should be mindful of him? the son of man that you should seek him out? You have made him but little lower than the angels; you adorn him with glory and honor; You give him mastery over the works of your hands; you put all things under his feet.

That's us the Psalmist is writing about! You and me.

That wonderful reality is true for our race —the human race. It is true for each and every one of us individually. In some mysterious and unfathomable way that we'll never really understand, the throbbing heart of love at the origin and center of the universe produced you . . . and me. We are God's beloved children. We haven't earned that love. And we never will. We don't have to!

I like to remind myself from time to time of a passage from Marilynne Robinson's tender novel *Gilead*. In the novel, a father who is facing his own death writes a long letter to his six-year-old son. He wants to leave something for his little son to remember him by. The letter contains these words:

Your hair is straight and dark, and your skin is very fair. I suppose you're not prettier than most children. You're just a nice-looking boy, a bit slight, well scrubbed and well mannered. All that is fine, but it's your existence I love you for, mainly.

That is a description of our relationship with God! God loves us not because of how we look, what we have, what we accomplish. God loves us because God created us in God's image. We are God's beloved children. The only ones created in the image of God!

Remaining true to the centering slogan of the day, let's look at our relationship with Creation. Remember: "It's the relationships, stupid."

As much as God loves us — [and we cannot even begin to imagine how much that is] — that is how much God counts on us. God also loves God's creation.

On each of the six days of creation, God witnessed what had been created and, we're told, "*God saw that it was good.*" Then, in some kind of crescendo of creation, at the very end of the process, the Bible tells us that "*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.*"

Creation is "very good" in the eyes of God. God treasures God's Creation. God treasures that Creation immensely.

And just who did God choose to place in charge of God's good creation? You and me! Those whom God has loved from the very beginning of creation and before. Those who are created in the image of God are the very ones — the only ones — whom God trusted enough to make them stewards of all that God had created.

Remember what the Bible said?

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."

The word in our reading from Genesis this morning that comes to us as "dominion" is the Hebrew word "*radah*." My beloved Old Testament professor, the late Bernhard Anderson, always insisted that the Hebrew word "*radah*" should be translated, not as "dominion," but as "responsible stewardship." Since Professor Anderson was literally the single most published Old Testament scholar on the planet, I never wanted to argue with him. And I still don't!!

Humans are called — humans are created — to exercise "responsible stewardship" of Creation on behalf of the Creator himself.

This is a good day for us to begin to understand the enormous implications of our seeing our relationship with Creation as that of "responsible stewards."

Over the past few years, a significant truth has begun to emerge:

We are not apart from nature, absolutely free and empowered to impose our will as objects as on a subject that is separate from ourselves.

We are a part of nature. We have been placed in Creation to be "responsible stewards" of a Creation of which we are a part. How we treat Creation has its ultimate impact on ourselves.

Pope Francis wrote about this two years ago in his encyclical on the climate, *Laudato Si*:

"Praise be to you, my Lord". In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life. This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she "groans in travail." We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth; our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.

Trinity Sunday is a good day for us to reexamine our relationship with God, and with God's "very good" creation.

I'll take us back in time almost 400 years to leave us with a vision that I believe will help.

The seventeenth-century Anglican priest and poet George Herbert arrived at a creative new way of understanding the role of humans as “responsible stewards” of God’s creation:

*Man is the worlds high Priest: he doth present
The sacrifice for all
Of all the creatures both in sea and land
Onely to Man thou hast made known thy wayes,
And put the penne alone into his hand,
And made him Secretarie of thy praise.*

Secretary of God’s praise. That is an awesome job description! We humans have been placed at the pinnacle of Creation — not to swoop down like a bird of prey in dominion and subjugation. But as “responsible stewards” — faithful caretakers — with hands lifted upwards in praise of the One who loved us enough to entrust us with this good Creation in the first place.

Isn’t that amazing! Almost 400 years ago, a faithful Christian offered us an alternative vision of our relationship with God, and with God’s creation. It is a vision that we really need in the days we are living through and in the decisions we face. We face an urgent need to find new ways to live into that vision now, more than ever.

Pope Francis cried out for this in *Laudato Si*:

"We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family. We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the [Creation], and that being good and decent are worth it."

After all, on Trinity Sunday, and on every day of the year, “It’s the relationships, stupid!”