

“Beck and Call”

Sermon – June 7, 2020 Stone Presbyterian Church

“In the beginning...and to the end of the age.” Today’s scripture passages take us from the beginning of creation to Jesus’ promise to be with us to the end of the age and all on Trinity Sunday, the only church holiday about a doctrine than an event and the last church celebration or holiday until Reformation Sunday the last Sunday in October.

In the past I have discussed the cosmology and meaning of this creation story that appears at the beginning of the bible, though it was probably written down after the Jews came back from exile in Babylon after being set free by the Persians.

The priests’ purpose with this creation story was not to explain how the world was created—at least not in the modern scientific sense. It was to proclaim the authority of God as creator and thus to be worshipped.

God is so powerful that God alone makes everything from the sky to the great sea monsters. And he does so from proclaiming it: “God *said* ‘Let there be light’; and *there* was light!”

God beckons, God calls, and things happen! Now while everything is at God’s beck and call, he does endow his final creation, humankind, with having “dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

But this is not for humans to do as *they* want, but to act as agents of God in the image of God, to care for creation. A creation that God repeatedly views as “good” until at the end “God saw *everything* that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

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This is a creation where everything is interconnected to one another, a creation where all creatures of God are a *community* in relationship.

With having “dominion” over everything on earth, human beings cannot rest back and assume that God will take care of everything or that the future of the creation is solely in God's hands.

We are called not to passively observe, but to genuinely engage. How we do so can be for better or for worse; to do so in the image of God or in our own selfish ways.

And, of course, we messed it up, starting two chapters later with Adam and Eve and that fruit from tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but certainly not ending there.

Fortunately, God the Creator, God the Father, sent his only son to redeem us who leaves us with his final words in today’s gospel lesson from the end of Matthew’s account.

Matthew takes very seriously this story of the ruin of the relationship between earth and heaven. When Genesis and Matthew speak of “heaven and earth” they are using a shorthand notation to speak about God’s *whole* creation and yet in only with Jesus’ defeat of death that the breach between heaven and earth is mended.

In Matthew’s account it is only Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who find the empty tomb and meet the risen Jesus on Easter morning who gives them the message, “go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Today’s passage takes place after that with the eleven disciples going to Galilee based only on hope from the women’s message. And then as

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verse 17 says, “When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.”

How does Jesus respond? “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

He does not try to convince them that he is the risen Christ per se. The implication is, “I have repaired the breach between heaven and earth and therefore I have authority over all creation.”

What is meant by “authority”? As Professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary, Craig Koester says, “Authority is followability.” Followability. That is, true authority is what gives people the confidence to follow. Contrast this with being “authoritarian”, which is forcing people to do what you want.

Jesus then goes on to say, “Go therefore and make disciples of all peoples.” He says this to disciples who are still trying to take it all in. But he doesn’t wait for them to catch up.

Because Jesus commissions not perfect disciples, but people who both worship and doubt as they stand at the edge of the world that is passing away and the one that is coming to them.

This mixture of faith and doubt characterizes discipleship. We are to go and do the work Christ has commissioned us with the confidence of faith, but with the humility of doubt so that we continually turn to God for guidance.

How are we then to make disciples of others? By baptizing them—initiating them—in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and then following through as Jesus said by “teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

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Now here a better translation here of “obey” would be “observe” or “keep”.

In other words, to “*follow* everything Jesus has taught, to do in the image of Jesus. And fundamentally what Jesus taught was to love our neighbor as God loves us.

And our actions should reflect our beliefs. Statements of faith are important within communities, but Matthew reminds us that faith without appropriate behavior is empty.

Sadly, today we see how far our behavior has strayed from love. How the death of George Floyd has ignited a fury of people frustrated with systemic injustice to people of color as well as to those not in the “mainstream” of society and they were further infuriated with those who dismiss those grievances in name of “law and order” rather than engage with Christ’s message of “love and mercy.”

Paul’s message to the Corinthians in today’s epistle passage seems apropos.

The Corinthians had begun to oppose Paul and question the validity of his message and hence his second letter to them.

Paul pleads with them in verse 11 to “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.”

The presence of joy and peace are the indicators of the Spirit’s transformative work to reveal God’s kingdom. Paul’s closing in 2 Corinthians is not simply an appeal for the church to get along, it is an exhortation for the Corinthians to be the new creation that the Spirit is equipping them to be. To remember God is the source of grace, love, and community. That message is for us as well or even moreso.

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It is Christ who brought grace, God who loves, and the Spirit that creates the church and in whom believers live and serve.

So, in Christ and through the Holy Spirit's power, God beckons us to represent God's mission in the world. And as Christians God calls us to model God's grace in God's good creation. We are to go and do the work of reconciling one to another so that we are in relationship with each other.

And though you may have doubts in these troubled times, keep your faith with these parting words of Jesus in your heart: “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

In the name of God the Father, the Creator; God the Son, the Redeemer; and God the Holy Spirit, the Sustainer. Amen.