

Feast of the Holy Trinity • June 7, 2020ⁱ

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

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Genesis 1:1-2:4a

“In the Beginning”

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. That one statement frames everything. Literally. These first words from the Bible put the rest of the scriptures in focus. They call us to understand where we are in the scope of things. God created everything. Everything, from nothing. And you and I, we are part of that grand picture. This sentence is a confession, a statement of faith, because it acknowledges our origin. It speaks to our place in the universe as created beings. As human beings, we must understand our history, how we got to where we're at, if we're going to make sense of the present – especially in times such as this.

Our history starts with God. God created everything, including time itself. And He did it out of love. That's the amazing truth that rings out through the pages of the Bible. God is love: He continually, constantly gives of Himself to others, desiring good for them. That love poured out in the act of Creation, whereby the universe we inhabit came into existence. That love poured out when the crown of God's creation, humanity, doubted His grace and fell into sin, yet God still promised a Savior. That love poured out when the promised Savior, Jesus, God the Son, bled and died so that Creation would be redeemed. That love poured out at Pentecost, when God the Holy Spirit filled the disciples and empowered them to speak and share God's love with all our world.

The Bible, from its opening line, tells us about God.

On this day in the church year when we proclaim and celebrate the Holy Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Three-in-One – let's take a moment to remember that our Triune God has given humanity His Word, the Holy Scriptures, as a gift of His love. The Bible is not a prop, something to be used to show off one's implied righteousness. The Bible is not a fairy tale, a fanciful story that people invented to help humanity feel less alone in all our brokenness. The Bible is not a science textbook, exploring the mechanics of the physical world. It is so much better than any of those things! The Bible teaches us about God and His works: how He has revealed Himself to His Creation and what He does to rescue it. Through it, we get to know the One who created us and everything else, then stepped into that creation to heal it from brokenness. God's given His Word so that you and I and all people might have restored life with Him.

Last Sunday, we celebrated the festival of Pentecost. We rejoiced that God the Holy Spirit came to be with Jesus' disciples, empowering them and sending them out to share the gospel with all people. Why did God do this? Because He wants all people to experience life with Him.

Today in worship we confess our faith together using the words of the Athanasian Creed. It's one of the three ecumenical creeds, statements of faith that have been shared by Christians across the centuries. When we express our faith in the words of the creeds, we are telling what we, along with Christians from other places and times, have learned about God by His Word. The Athanasian Creed – the longest of the three – aims to articulate what the Bible teaches about the mystery of the Trinity. How God is one God, yet three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We get a glimpse of the Trinity in Genesis 1:1-3 as God the Father creates by the speaking of the Word, God the Son (cf. John 1:14), and the Spirit hovers over the waters.

If you're wondering about the point of all this, here it is: the Athanasian Creed speaks to who God is and what He has done **and continues to do** because you matter to Him. It's summed up in Jesus. God the Son came down to be born as a descendent of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to live life perfectly in our broken world, to redeem all of creation. The faith which God gives us through the working of Word and Spirit, as the Athanasian Creed confesses, saves and brings restored life with God.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. God created you. He wants you to experience the fullness of life that He sets before you as a gift, even as He did with Adam and Eve in humanity's first days. God created you. He knows where there's brokenness in your life, even in those places you won't admit or don't even know. He doesn't want it to hold you captive. God created you. Your life matters to Him. God created you. And God created your neighbor, too.

Your neighbor's life matters.

Over the past couple of weeks, our nation — and now our world — looks to finally be experiencing a wake-up call in how we treat one another. We've seen the evil of racism on display, without shame. We've seen some police officers abusing their authority and perpetrating injustice, betraying their responsibility to serve and protect their fellow citizens. We've seen agents of chaos and destruction use protests as opportunities to sow fear and further pain. This is not who God designed us to be!

God created everything, and it was good. But humanity listened to the tempter's lies and doubted our Creator's love. **Sin entered our world, and our world fell apart.** It's still broken. You can see it in how we treat one another. We all have fallen short.

Repent. Repent of the sin in your life, where you've chosen to listen to the tempter's lies and doubted your Creator's love for you. Repent of the sins of racism and prejudice and hatred, which stand on doubt and fear and vanity. They have no place in your life. God created you. And God created your neighbor, too.

Christians are called to confess our faith together in this broken and hurting world, not only in our creeds but also in our lives. As the Church right now, we have the clear opportunity to proclaim that, indeed, Black lives matter, too. That's not a political assertion, it's theological. Jesus gave his life to redeem all people. He rose so that all people might have new life in him.

Instead of standing on the sidelines in these days, take the time to listen. Listen to the people who do not look like you. Hear what they have to say about their experience of life, which might be very different from your own. Spend unhurried time with your neighbor, that fellow soul who is a fellow creation, a soul for whom our Savior stepped down into this world. As followers of Jesus who have been sent out with the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20), sent by the Holy Spirit to share His gifts and point others to Christ and his redeeming and reconciling work, let's look to God's Word for direction in how we treat our neighbor. In Colossians 3, St. Paul writes, "*Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*" (Col. 3:12-14)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Hear the Scriptures speak this Trinity Sunday from the opening chapters of the Bible and know whose you are. God has framed history with the marks of His love for His Creation. Both you and your neighbor are part of that Creation. What's more, the God who created, who sustains, who redeems, who sanctifies has called you to be His own. As His own people, forgiven and reconciled in Jesus, let us put on love, being who our Lord makes us to be. Let us go. Let us listen. Let us show and tell of God's love, so that all our world might experience life with Him.

Amen.

ⁱ Passage for memory:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. – Genesis 1:1