

Esse Quam Videri. Ut Prosim. Think and Do.

Bob Stillerman

Trinity Sunday, 6-7-2020

Genesis 1:1-2:3



a spiritually
progressive
community
of faith

It's fitting that Trinity Sunday, as well as the first creation story of Genesis align with Graduation Sunday. The Trinitarian Concept would satisfy the basic structure of any college-level essay: a main thesis – Praise God from whom all blessings flow; three supporting bullets – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost; and a concise, but effective conclusion: Alleluia and Amen! Well, actually, the professor might penalize you for the connector at the end, but still, good work on the whole!

And the first creation story from Genesis would be graded well, too! It's not every piece of literature that can take the complexity of the earth's origins, and offer such a balance of conciseness and rich imagery. All in all, I think most professors would give it a B+...Hey, this is college, y'all, we don't give away grades here!

But funny anecdotes aside, I think creation and trinity are very applicable topics for a Graduation Sunday, because no matter what you do, no matter where you go, no matter how long you occupy this earth, in some form or another, you are going to engage in ongoing conversations about two very essential questions: What is the source of our being? And what is the nature and character of that source?

This morning, I'm not implying that these two questions are the only important ones to consider. They aren't. And I'm not implying that Genesis One and the doctrine of the Trinity are the absolute, end-all-be-all sources of authority in discerning these two questions. They aren't.

But I will tell you that I believe the question of our source and its character, and the exploration of the first creation story, and the doctrine of the Trinity are worthy pursuits. When we begin to consider our origins, we begin to know ourselves, and we begin to know our neighbors, too.

The genius of today's text is its commentary on order and shaping. From chaos, just darkness and a boggy, watery nothingness, God takes a deep breath, a creating, sustaining breath, and calms the commotion. God separates the light from the dark – that is to say, God illumines all the things that are disconnected, and sets about piecing them all together. And if you follow the sequence of the

Esse Quam Videri. Ut Prosim. Think and Do.

Bob Stillerman

Trinity Sunday, 6-7-2020

Genesis 1:1-2:3



a spiritually
progressive
community
of faith

text, there is a fascinating pattern of order and symmetry. In days one, two, and three, God separates light from darkness, the sky from the seas, and the land from the seas. Then, in days four, five, and six, God fills these building blocks with creatures: night and day, stars, sun, and moon; plants and vegetation, birds and fish; animals and human beings. God deems every day and evening of creation “good.” God even rests. And even better, God has a way of connecting all of these good things – God calls all of the days and nights, and the things, people, and places that inhabit them, “very good.”

So...when we wonder about our source, we are reminded of something that is complex and mysterious, and yet also industrious, and detailed, and collaborative. Here is One with the power to tame the chaos monster, the humility to expend boundless energy and devotion in making the tiniest of molecules and micro-organisms, and the common sense to rest in the fruit of God’s good work (which ironically includes real, actual fruit!).

All of this is to say, each of us is made from a compassionate, marvelous, invested, ingenious, mysterious, soulful, melodious Creator. And the substance of that Creator is in each of us. If God’s goodness, and indeed our own goodness, are each a starting point for how we view the world, I think they become fundamental in how we choose to live in the world.

And yes, it’s Trinity Sunday, a Sunday devoted to a doctrine that you won’t actually find written about in our canonized scriptures, at least not in absolute terms. This doctrine has roots as far back as the second century, but becomes codified, and attached to our tradition in the fourth century at the Council of Nicaea. The earliest Christians, just like us modern-day Christians, struggled with a way to succinctly describe the nature and character of God. Theirs was one God, whose essence was expressed in many forms. And they wanted find a way to express how one form did not supersede another, but rather existed in collaboration, shared in a partnering essence. The result, God as Father, a creating force, God as Son, manifested in human form in the life of Jesus, and as agent of redemption, and God as Spirit, a sustaining source throughout the ages. Despite its longevity, and despite, I believe, its authenticity, such a doctrine is incomplete and flawed. We as humanity will never be able to fully describe that

Esse Quam Videri. Ut Prosim. Think and Do.

Bob Stillerman

Trinity Sunday, 6-7-2020

Genesis 1:1-2:3



a spiritually
progressive
community
of faith

which we cannot fully comprehend – our language for the divine is limited. Of course, we could argue the same for our canon of scripture – its thousands and thousands of words, and its heartfelt authenticity, are also inadequate in providing 100% clarity and resolution. But I don't think something's lack of perfection makes it any less useful.

This triangle is pretty complicated, even in its simplicity. But you might prefer squares, or pentagons, or hexagons, or even icosagons (that's twenty sides!). I would encourage you to do the hard work of finding the shapes, images, verses, metaphors, and expressions that illumine the divine in your own lives. In some instances, traditional images may resonate, in others it might be more non-traditional images that provoke and inspire your senses. Either way is fine, and in anyway in between. Because each of you come from a very good source, who has given you very good gifts, who has created in you with extraordinary potential.

So that's a quick glance at creation and trinity. I can't possibly say all there is to say in a sermon, or even many sermons. We're always searching to give shape to the divine. But let me offer three phrases that I think are of particular import to our four graduates, and that might help in our theological pursuits.

Reid and Matthew: *Esse Quam Videri* – To Be Rather Than to Seem

Joey: *Ut Prosim* – That I May Serve

Lauren: Think and Do (Sorry no Latin!)

These are the mottos of the two universities, Appalachian State and Virginia Tech, that Reid, Matthew, and Joey will enter this fall, and the motto of NC State, from which Lauren recently graduated this spring. Fitting words, as we pursue this source of ours, and its nature and character.

I would argue, that God has created each us as beings, not merely appearances. And so it seems to me, pardon the pun, that Reid and Matthew, you have the opportunity to spend the coming years discerning who it is God is calling you to be. God shaped a world, where everything, big and small, adds depth, and

Esse Quam Videri. Ut Prosim. Think and Do.

Bob Stillerman

Trinity Sunday, 6-7-2020

Genesis 1:1-2:3



a spiritually
progressive
community
of faith

dimension, and joy, and purpose to the greater creation – creatures in harmony with creation. Take this time to get to know yourselves, to pay attention to your own unique gifts, and as Frederick Buechner says, “find that place where your deep gladness meets the world’s great need.” And take heart, though this may seem challenging and overwhelming at times, you are undergirded in the presence of One who calls you, Beloved. And to redact a famous phrase from *Parks and Recreation*, every now and again, be sure to “Treat Yosef.”

Are we not all created to serve? Too often the idea of dominion in the creation story has been tied to rule or dominance, and not as the act of servanthood. But we have all been called to be servants of God’s creation – to till fertile soil; to enhance and ensure the welfare of the creatures who inhabit creation with us; to be as Christ was to us, one who loved God and neighbor as self. Joey, as you head to Blacksburg, may the years ahead model servanthood for you, and may you also find that place where need of neighbor meets the heart-work of joy. And don’t forget, Hokie, Hokie, Hokie, Hy, Tech, Tech, V.P.I.!!!

Somehow, somehow, this creator of ours has endowed us with an ability to think about our own existence. Somehow, somehow, this creator of ours has endowed us with an ability to freely determine our own actions. Somehow, somehow, this creator of ours has endowed us with gifts to turn our thoughts into action. Lauren, as you consider your source, and the nature and character of that source, may you continue to be a person who thinks and does. In your ministry to follow, think about the good things God has created. Think about the words we use to describe that God – which people groups are represented, and which ones aren’t? How might you use your gifts, your language, your life to be a witness of that very good Creator of ours, particularly to those who struggle to experience that goodness? And of course, Red. White. Wolf. Pack!!!

I’ll close with this thought. They say each generation inherits its own set of challenges, and inherits its own groundbreaking history. For many among us, their college days and early adult lives coincided with Vietnam, the modern Civil Rights Movement, the Women’s Movement, the Kennedy and King assassinations, Woodstock, and the Moon Landing, just to name a few. For my generation, Grunge Rock, the end of the Cold War, Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, an Impeachment, and

Esse Quam Videri. Ut Prosim. Think and Do.

Bob Stillerman

Trinity Sunday, 6-7-2020

Genesis 1:1-2:3



a spiritually
progressive
community
of faith

something called the Internet seemed to be much less weighty than what our parents and grandparents inherited. Though looking back, those days were still significant in shaping our current world. And you, my friends, face some unenviable and unprecedented challenges, but challenges that if solved, have the potential to be transformative: a pandemic, a reckoning with institutionalized racism and classism, a virtual economy, an environmental crisis, even something called TikTok. You are living through the very moments that your children and grandchildren will study in their history courses.

There is injustice, and evil, and unfairness in this world. I don't need to spell that out for you – there's no where you can look right now without being made aware of humanity's shortcomings, our lack of empathy for neighbors, or of our clinginess to powers and principalities. And as college students, you are about to read a whole lot of books that will offer you perspectives from every imaginable angle. I dare say, that you, like your Creator, will begin the process of separating light from darkness.

Separating doesn't mean eliminating or ignoring, instead it means distinguishing. You have gifts, and creativity, and wisdom, and compassion that can help us brave the dark shadows of the present, and draw out the light of love and justice in this world. Perhaps you know the hashtag that will trend needed awareness; perhaps you know have the tenor to strike the tones of dialogue; perhaps you have a pen that evokes reason, or a song that tugs at a nation's heart strings...whatever the case may be, we need you to be light in this world. Because when we are light, we become what intends God us to be, not what the world seems to think we are; and we find the courage to serve one another; and in well-lit spaces, we value our thoughts and ideas, and allow them to become manifested actions of spirit.

Esse Quam Videri. Ut Prosim. Think and Do.

May it be so, friends, and may it begin right now. Amen.