

2026 Trinity

I've been preaching Trinity sermons for 25 years now, and today I'm going to give in to temptation and do what I've always wanted to do.

Here's my sermon on the Trinity: It's a mystery.

And now I'll spend the rest of my time talking about that first reading, one of my favorites.

I'm going to start by quoting myself from a few years ago:

Imagine for a few minutes that you woke up one morning to find that your home country had been invaded by another, stronger force. Imagine that everything you love about the city or town in which you have lived your whole life has been reduced to rubble. Imagine that you are forced to leave the place you know, and trek across miles to a foreign land.

This is the context in which all the stories which we now call the book of Genesis were compiled into the first book of the Torah.

Those first chapters of Scripture which you just heard were written by people struggling to understand God and themselves in exile in a nation that worshiped some other deity. Their captors told different stories of our origins. Their stories often began with stories of gods at war with each other, each trying to get the upper hand. In some, humans were a mistake, an unexpected development in one god's attempt to overthrow the others. In other tales, humans were created as cannon fodder or slaves, tools to be used in a great battle between gods who didn't care what became of their creation. How might your faith be different if our story didn't begin with the assertion that God created us out of love and joy and care?

This is part of what frustrates me in the endless debates between creationists and evolutionists. They have completely missed the point. These verses were never meant to be a scientific textbook explanation of how the universe came into existence. These verses are a poem—a love poem—told by people who had forgotten their own worth. Our creation myth was not intended to answer the question how; it was intended to answer the question why. God created us...

And it was good.

I often imagine a group of exiles sitting around a fire at night, saying or perhaps even singing this creation story

to one another under the stars, a kind of protest song against the circumstances in which they found themselves. If you can step away from all the tension and argument and just let it flow over you, you might hear it the way it was intended to be heard, rather than the ways in which it has been tortured and twisted to fulfill some other purpose.

It says that God is not indifferent to creation; God cares about us because God created us for God's own self to love. With that in mind, if you look again at this story, it's impressive how close they were able to come to the actual progression of events according to science. "And then there was light" could easily be one way of describing the Big Bang. You don't have to take this story literally to understand the deeper truth it holds: God cares about us because we belong to God, and God is with us—even when we are far from home or our lives have been reduced to ash.

God cares for us and for all creation, and all creation is good. That is where our scriptures begin.

As I reminded Kyalo and Evangeline last week, the Bible is a library of books—66 of them—that each tell us something about how the people who wrote them understood God and God's working in the world. It is not a single narrative with a single author. There are internal

contradictions and confusing passages. It's meant to be read, studied, wrestled with. It's more like a Zen koan than the rules printed inside the cover of the Scrabble box.

One of the kids asked why it's so vague sometimes. (I heard echoes of the late Lanny Wenthe, former deacon of this church, asking in frustration, "Why can't Jesus just speak *plainly*?!")

The answer is not a comfortable one, I'm afraid. It can't give straightforward, plain answers, because that's not what life is. Life is not that easy. Most of the choices we have to make in this life are not between a clearly holy option and a clearly evil one. We don't really have an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other. What we have is our own self, created good, created in the image of God, but also bound by the limitations of time and space which sometimes mean having to use our free will to make a decision without being able to see the whole picture. Without being able to see how the choice I make today might have consequences I couldn't foresee and never intended.

We are made in the image of God...but we are not actually God.

And that's okay.

We're still good.

That was the other thing I pointed out to Kyalo and Evangeline last Sunday. This story tells us we are *good*. I wasn't prepared for the look of surprise that flashed across their faces. These two kids, who have been part of this congregation for most of their young lives, were still caught off-guard by the idea that they are good.

I don't think this is a sign of failure on the part of those of us involved in their spiritual formation. It is not an indication that this congregation is anything but loving and welcoming and encouraging.

It is, instead, a sign of just how much the wider world bombards us with the message that there is something wrong with us. Billions of dollars is spent advertising products that promise to fix whatever is wrong with us—but first it has to convince us something *is* wrong. Something is lacking. We aren't enough.

Made in the image of God? Pfaugh.

That doesn't sell deodorant or a flashy car.

And yet, that is exactly what this story tells us. We are made in the image of God.

I'm not pretending to know exactly what that means.

Each of us might spend our entire lives trying to figure it out.

In fact, that's my challenge to you this week. What does it mean to you that you are made in the image of God? What does it mean to you that other people are also made in the image of God?

I am pretty sure each of us will come up with a different answer, based on our own experiences. That's part of the beauty of existence—reflected in that creation story we heard. God loves variety. God distinguishes between light and dark, land and sea, etc. But God declares *all* of it good.

And even if we took the insight of every human being who ever lived, we would still only have a rough approximation of what that 'image of God' is.

Why? Because, to quote one of the Wednesday morning folks, "God is so much more than we can imagine."

In other words, even if we leave out the Trinity talk, we come back to the same conclusion.

It's a mystery.

Amen.