

Sermon, Father William J. Albinger

May 18, 2008

Trinity Sunday A 2008

In the Name of our ever Creating, Loving and Sustaining God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today we celebrate Trinity Sunday. Unlike other Feast Days which celebrate events, this is the one Sunday where we celebrate a doctrine or theological concept: How we as Christians experience and know God. In a way, today's reading cap off a long period of theological reflection that started with Advent and ended last Sunday with Pentecost. Our readings today point to God in everything and in all times. Today's first reading from Genesis are the opening lines of the Bible and take us back to the very beginning of all things, including time, Today's Gospel lesson are the last lines of Matthew's Gospel and they point us towards the end of time. In between, there is us and everything else.

The Spirit of God hovered over the dark waters of chaos and in majestic words, Genesis tells the story of how the Spirit, through a process of separation, created the order from which all things and all life emerged and still emerge. Many people think since this story opens the Bible it must be one of the oldest books in the Bible. That probably isn't correct. Most modern biblical scholars believe that it was written during the Babylonian Captivity (about 550BC) by the educated Jews who had been taken as slaves following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586BC. It was

written for their fellow Jews who had been dragged off into bondage after witnessing the destruction of their nation and religion as well as of their city and temple.

Consider their situation. Everything that gave meaning to their lives had been destroyed and they were slaves in an alien culture. What was on their minds? Will this ever end? Will I ever have my own life and identity again? What will become of my children? The problem was that the Babylonian God Marduk, who was called “the lord of the foundation of heaven and earth”, seemed to hold all the cards. Their enemies had destroyed their nation and their situation seemed hopeless. These opening words of the book of Genesis were written to answer these questions and to overturn the violent warrior god Marduk by positing **a very different God of all creation**. “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the deep.” God was not a destructive violent God. God’s Spirit hovered over the primordial chaos like a hen hovers over her nest, brooding there until new life emerges.

The truth the authors of these verses were trying to tell was that no chaos, no destruction, no darkness in which we or anyone else finds ourselves exists out of which God cannot call forth new life. That was the question on the people’s minds, was the situation hopeless or could God indeed create new life from the empty darkness of their lives? It is not a scientific explanation of the world’s creation but it is an answer to some of life’s basic questions: *Is it safe to trust? Is it safe to hope?*

When we lack trust, when we lack hope, the world becomes a fearful place. We all have our fears: of loosing our jobs, of loosing our spouses, of getting old, of dying. Usually our defenses are about things we cannot control. Think of all the time and

energy we pour into erecting defenses to things we cannot control. Usually they involve avoidance or hiding. Fear leads us to separate ourselves from life and if left unchecked leads to despair. The God of the Bible calls us into life and into hope.

The captive scribes and priests then organized the stories and traditions of their people in a way that would point to how God was always creating - continually bringing new life from hopeless situations. Through the waters of the flood came the ark bearing life. From the childless marriage of elderly Abraham and Sarah came the birth of the Jewish people. The patriarch Joseph not only survived being sold into slavery by his brothers but later was able to save his family from famine by bringing them to Egypt. Later when the Jews had been enslaved in Egypt, God sent Moses to bring them out of Egypt into the Promised Land.

Today's Gospel lesson is from Matthew. Matthew has a thing for mountains. Jesus gives his first teaching, the Sermon on the Mount, from a mountain. In today's lesson, we find the disciples on the mountain to which Jesus had directed them in his resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. It is on this mountain that they have their Easter experience when they encounter the Risen Christ. The Gospel candidly tells us some worshipped and some doubted. Again we find the ever creating God bringing life out darkness and despair.

Here were eleven men who had just seen their leader and teacher crucified on the cross after being judged an enemy by Rome and a heretic by the Temple authorities. What are they to do now? They are probably in danger themselves of being crucified. Where are they to go? What should they believe and trust in? Can they go back to their old lives that now seem drab and empty? Things probably seemed pretty dark and hopeless. Again, the ever creating biblical God brings forth

life out of chaos and despair. This time God brings new life from the seemingly impossible – from the dreaded cross and from the tomb. God overcomes even the might of Caesar Augustus!

Our Gospel reading tells us the story isn't over yet. Jesus gives them the Great Commission – to go out into the world making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of this biblical God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and teaching them to trust and hope as Jesus had taught them. The last words of Matthew's gospel are important. They contain a promise that brings us into the creative power of God – “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

The Risen One sends them down the mountain to go out into the world to baptize and teach. He does this with a promise that they will never be alone – he will be with them wherever they are for all time. They probably went down that mountain with the same questions we have. Is it safe to trust? Is it safe to hope? Is it better to hide, to hunker down and build up some defenses? Jesus tells his disciples to go forth not only into new lives but also to bring new life to others.

This is our narrative. It is our story that we will hear and witness again in the coming months as we join Matthew in following Jesus through his ministry. It is our story that gives us our identity and shapes our view of the world around us. It is the story that answers those basic questions: Is it safe to trust? Is it safe to hope? It is also the greatest gift we can give our children.

Amen.