

Genesis 1:1-2:4a
6/11/17

Psalms 8 (UMH 743-744)
Trinity Sunday A

In God's Image

It happened in the springtime, some years ago. Bob and I had been in the mountains for a few days. On the morning of the last day, we breakfasted on the porch, serenaded by birdsong, looking out into a breathtaking cathedral of forest garlanded with mountain laurel, surrounded by the sacred stillness of ancient hills.

But then the appointed hour arrived. It was time to leave. So we packed up, got in the car, and headed down the interstate to the lowcountry, where I was serving then. Not many hours later, we were driving through greening expanses of tidal marsh, grasses bending in the breeze, gulls wheeling, egrets feeding, all under the great azure bowl of sky. That same evening, we walked the windswept beach at sunset, sand like velvet under bare feet. The vastness and power of the Atlantic stretching to the horizon and beyond. The first star.

All these gifts—given in one day. Different worlds. Different ecosystems. Each fashioned by the same Maker. In one

day, indescribable beauty that astonishes and humbles and fills with awe at the goodness and glory of the Creator.

The One whose handiwork you too have reveled in. The One whose fingers form the mountains and fix the boundaries of the seas. The One who hangs the moon and the stars. The One who brings order out of chaos. The One who sets in place the rhythms of morning and evening, seedtime and harvest. The One who makes sparrow and whale, bee and butterfly, mouse and elephant.

But of all the Divine Designer's wonders, the crowning work of them all is humankind. After God created humans, God looked over the whole creation and saw that it was good, so very good. For God has made human beings in God's own image. Only human creatures are made in the image of God.

And for a very long time, people of faith have been talking and writing about the significance of being created in God's image. That significance is what I'd like to reflect on with you during this time together. Today the church offers you and me this reading from Genesis for our celebration of Trinity Sunday: a time to praise and worship the one God who reveals Godself to us as Father, as Son, and as Holy Spirit.

This God is outside of time. Every beginning and every ending is in our God. When God begins to create, God's wind, God's Spirit, sweeps over the inky deeps. God speaks. And through God's Word, the heavens and the earth are created.

We've heard that the One we know as Jesus Christ is this very Word, in the opening of another biblical narrative: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.*

Incarnate Word. Almighty One. Spirit of Holiness. This God who is three in One. This God whose greatness infinitely transcends finite human understanding—this Trinity—is not a riddle to be solved, but a mystery to be embraced. This God in whom we live and move and have our being. This God in whose image we are made.

But being created in God's image—what does that mean to us? And what does that mean *for* us? What import and impact does being made in God's image have on your life and mine?

You and I are made in the image of the One in whose reign justice will roll down like waters. You and I are made in the

image of the One who comes in Jesus to turn an upside-down world right-side up. A world in which the lowly will be lifted up. A world in which the hungry will be filled. A world in which the widow and the orphan and the alien will be cared for. A world in which the last will be first. A world in which the least will be greatest.

Being made in God's image means that we *too* strive for justice. That we become God's hands, working to transform this old *status quo* world into a just world.

And you and I are made in the image of the One who seeks peace. The One who will rule over a peaceable kingdom where the wolf will lie down with the lamb. Where no one will hurt or destroy. For God has given all creatures—both animal and human—every green plant for food. This God blesses peacemakers and calls you and me to *be* peacemakers. To seek peace.

In one of our hymns we sing the lyrics: *Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.* Can I begin the process of beating swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks? Please consider: When conflict and aggression and violence proliferate, am I to remain silent? How does my life—and yours

—need to change if we truly believe the scriptural teaching that all persons bear God’s image?

You and I are made in the image of this One who cares for the earth and all its inhabitants. The One who has fashioned each one with the greatest care, according to the habitat of each. In the words of John Wesley: *Whatever was created was good in its kind; suited to the end for which it was designed.* Ponder the detail with which living things are crafted. The exquisite tracery of a wildflower. The intricate pattern of each shell that houses a vulnerable sea creature. And the natural camouflage that allows so many animals to blend perfectly into their surroundings.

You and I are made in the image of the One whose very first words to human beings are about care of the earth and its creatures. Bearing God’s image means that you and I are to care for the earth in the way God cares for the earth. God has made the first humans—and you and me—stewards of the good creation. The Hebrew words of Genesis charge you and me with *responsibility*: not to control, exploit and consume, but to nurture and protect. To live with concern and compassion for others.

In the words of Shirley Erena Murray: *Touch the earth lightly / Use the earth gently / Nourish the life of the world in our care.* Michael Collins, the astronaut, would surely agree. While orbiting the moon, he looked upon the earth, a faraway blue sphere. He observed: “It is a small and very fragile planet, and should be treated as such, a very delicate object.”

You and I are made in the image of the One who created the earth and then rested on the sabbath day. And so for us, keeping the sabbath holy is not so much duty as pure *gift* from the hand of God whose wisdom guides us to a balance between work and rest.

Yet, in our time, the yearning for sabbath rest has become countercultural. Since most of us were children—when Sundays were set apart and special—we’ve seen dramatic changes in our culture. Which now attempts to persuade us that all seven days are the same. But our minds and bodies tell us otherwise! They get tired. They let us know when we have pushed them too far by trying to accomplish all the tasks we possibly can, seven days a week. This is a lesson that pastors have to learn, too. God, who rested on the sabbath day, hallows it and asks you and me to hallow it as well. For we are to imitate this One in whose image

we are made. We are to be in the world the image of God; to be *for* the world the image of God.

The image of God who is gracious and good. This creation account is thought to have been authored at the time of Israel's exile in Babylon. It was written for a people whose lives seemed utterly hopeless. The realization of who they were—persons made in God's image—surely gave them hope. Because being created in the image of a good and gracious God assured their identity as persons of sacred worth.

And being created in the image of God means that *you* are a person of sacred worth! When you're not feeling so great about yourself, when you're not happy with who you see in the mirror, when you're alone and maybe even deeming yourself unlovable, I invite you, my sister, my brother, to remember that God delights in you. You are God's beloved child! You are God's beautiful creation. You are made in the image of God.

In the image of God who is One in three. Three who live in an eternally loving community of relationship with one another. This threefold God draws *you* into that relationship, which on earth is deepened and broadened and heightened in the community of faith. You've heard it said before that Christianity

is not meant to be practiced in solitude. God's good intention for you is that you be part of a household. You belong to a family—the family of God in whose loving image you are made.

The nature of this God is love. Being created in the image of God who first loved you, loving is at the center of who you are, at the center of your very being. Learning to love as God in Christ Jesus loves is what you're all about. Learning to love as this One loves is what you are called to do by God whose steadfast love for you will never end. No matter what! Because *you* are made in the image of our holy, triune God.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.