***A TEAM EFFORT***

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Texts: Genesis 1:1-2:4 and John 1:1-5, 10-14

*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 face of the waters.* Thus begins the story of creation and the story of God’s relationship with all that God created. From out of the dark, watery, formless void – the lyrical *tohu wabohu* in Hebrew – God brings light, from out of the primordial soup God brings life, from out of the churning chaos God brings order. It is not a scientific description, an answer to the *how* question of creation. It is a theological affirmation in poetic language, a divine answer to the *who* of creation. In the beginning, ***God*** created!

The word used for God there – *Elohim* – is plural in form but singular in meaning. Those who first penned that name had no concept of the Trinity – one God in three persons; their emphasis was on the singularity of the Creator in contrast to the polytheistic beliefs of their neighbors. Their bold claim is that one God made all things, including the sun, moon, stars, and kings who might be regarded as deities by other religions! *Elohim* is not the greatest god among gods, but the only true God, the God who creates all things. The Hebrew word for create is *bara*, and it is God alone who can *bara*. Humans make, shape, construct, and build; but God alone creates. The beginning of creation has its roots in that one God.

On this Trinity Sunday we acknowledge that the creative work of that one God is a team effort; in a great mystery of faith Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share in making all things as one God. The Spirit hovers over the watery chaos as God speaks creation into being; the Word of God, the *logos* who became flesh in the person of Jesus, was there in the beginning with God and was God, writes John. *All things came into being through him*. Among those *things* that came into being by the hands of the triune God is humankind; male and female God created them, in the image of God they were created. Reflecting on the miracle and mystery of that creation, Richard Rohr writes:

*God’s goal, it seems to me, is… the making of persons, not the making of a uniform mob, which means there is clear diversity…In the eternal scheme of things, we discover that all God wants from you is you. It’s just so humbling, because it always feels like not enough, doesn’t it?[[1]](#endnote-1)*

And yet it is enough! Humankind which is created in the image of God is wonderfully diverse, wonderfully different in so many ways: in appearance and ability, gender and race, sexual orientation and perspective. God seems to think that it is good that all creatures and people are not alike; diversity is a good thing in the created order of things! You do not have to be just like everybody else in order to reflect God’s image. It is in being yourself, *fearfully and wonderfully made* to quote the psalmist, that you reflect God’s image. That image is tarnished in all of us by sin, for even the greatest saints are sinners; but diversity itself does not tarnish God’s image in us, for it was in the image of God that we were created in the beginning. Not ***in*** ***spite*** of our diversity, but ***in*** our diversity we reflect the image of the triune God!

Somewhere along the line that good news, like so much of Scripture, has been appropriated and twisted by those with a different agenda. Instead of ***all*** people being created in God’s image, only ***some*** were found worthy to reflect God’s true image while other people were regarded as something less. Rhetoric from pulpits in Germany and the United States during World War I suggested that the enemy could not possibly be a person created in God’s image, and thus could be killed without remorse. Hutus in Rwanda during the genocide there 25 years ago labeled Tutsis as *cockroaches* to be exterminated rather than human beings to be treated humanely. In our own nation the specter of slavery that still haunts us declared African people brought forcibly from their own countries to these shores to be nothing more than personal property to be bought and sold, used and abused, at the will of their white owners – many of whom proclaimed themselves Christian. Again and again sin tempts those created in the image of God to play God and decide who is worthy to be considered truly human – and who is not.

We are a nation that is still haunted by that sin. We have renounced slavery by law, but we have never fully addressed the residual problems created by it: the economic inequities and inequalities that persist, the racism – explicit and implicit – that continues to rear its ugly head, the mistrust that is borne out of broken promises, the continued exaltation of a Confederacy that fought to keep slaves enslaved, the disparate treatment of people of color glaringly apparent today in the disproportionate number of deaths from COVID-19 in communities of color and in the unjust deaths of young black men at the hands of police officers and vigilantes. At root these problems reflect a continuing refusal to fully recognize all others – regardless of the color of their skin – as people created by God in the image of God who are precious to God and worthy of love, respect, and compassionate care.

We have watched this past week as frustration with that sinful reality and the long history of unresolved racism has found expression in marches by protestors who have sought to have their voices heard. While most of those protests have been peaceful, the enduring images of cars and buildings set ablaze in the night, violence by and against police officers, and threats of more violence in order to dominate protestors suggest that we still have not grasped the essence of our common creation in God’s image. Until we own up to our past and take steps to remedy its lingering toxic effects, until we recognize the image of God in all our neighbors, a just peace will be elusive in our nation. Incendiary rhetoric about domination is a corruption of God’s call to humans to exercise dominion (that is rule which includes responsibility for the well-being of others) over living things and brings us no closer to the just and peaceable kingdom of God in which we all hope to live.

In the midst of this pandemic, a struggling economy, climate change, overtly racist actions, angry protests, violence and threats of violence it may seem like our world is returning to that disordered chaos from which we were first created. But the God who created all things out of the formless void has promised to be with us, to stand with us and sustain us even when the image of God in us is badly tarnished in our day to day living. Jesus came to show us what that image of God in us should look like. It should look like love, like forgiveness, like self-sacrifice, like servanthood. It should look like him, unjustly crucified by the powers-that-be who would not accept him for who he was, still loving them and saying, “Forgive them for they know not what they do.” If we are to reflect that image of God in which we were created, then we must listen to Jesus’ teaching, follow his example, love our neighbors one and all, and work for the reconciliation of the world.

About fifty years ago our nation was wracked by riots, violence, and protests around issues of racial injustice and the Vietnam War. Many of the images resemble those of today, except for the bell bottom pants! In those turbulent times the Presbyterian Church adopted a confession that expressed their faith in the midst of the chaos. It is a confession rooted in our belief in the triune God who created us all and in God’s continuing call to us to seek reconciliation. Hear then what they had to say – to the world and to us:

*In Jesus Christ God was reconciling the world to God’s self. Jesus Christ is God with us. He is the eternal Son of the Father, who became human and lived among us to fulfill the work of reconciliation. He is present in the church by the power of the Holy Spirit to continue and complete his mission. This work of God – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is the foundation of all confessional statements about God, humanity, and the world. God has created the peoples of the world to be one universal family. In reconciling love, God overcomes barriers among people and breaks down every form of discrimination based on racial or ethnic difference, real or imaginary. The church labors for the abolition of all racial discrimination and ministers to those injured by it. Congregations, individuals, or groups of Christians who exclude, dominate, or patronize their fellow human beings, however subtly, resist the Spirit of God and bring contempt on the faith which they profess. Therefore, the church calls all people to be reconciled to God and to one another.* (From The Confession of 1967)

We will use that confession of faith as our affirmation of faith today and in coming weeks. But it is what we do in the intervening days that matters. We have been talking about reconciliation for fifty years now, but as events of these past weeks prove, we are still a long way from being reconciled to God and to one another. Enough is enough! Stop talking and start doing! ***Be reconciled*** to God, for it is the triune God who made you, died for you, forgives you, saves you, and calls you to be faithful! ***Be reconciled*** to one another, to all your brothers and sisters, for like you they are created in the image of God. ***Work*** for the reconciliation of our nation and world, that in our common life too we may be reconciled to one another and reflect the image of God. For our God is the triune God, creator of heaven and earth who is a God of love, justice, and peace, a God who brings creative order out of chaos – even out of the chaos of these days in which we live. Amen

1. Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, Whitaker House: 2016, pp.61-62 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)