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**Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Matthew 28:16-20**

## ONE AND THE SAME

The concept of the Trinity is probably the one of the most difficult to comprehend of all the doctrines and beliefs of the Christian faith. If you find the idea of the Trinity confusing, you join good company. The idea of God being three persons--Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, or more inclusively referred to as Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit--is indeed complex and mysterious. This strange belief has led some non-Christian peoples of other faiths to believe that Christians are in some way polytheistic--that we worship more than one God. And truthfully, I think a lot of Christians kind of embrace this idea on some level. Some Christians think of the Trinity as there being a big daddy God, Jesus his son, and then the Holy Spirit as some kind of weird thing with no personality. The Trinity is a mysterious concept that few really grasp.

However, Christians are adamant that we are *not* polytheistic. We do not worship three gods. Christians are very clear that there is only one God. But in the course of our history and experience, we acknowledge that we have experienced this God in three important ways: as Creator, as the Christ, and as the Holy Spirit. Somehow, this one God of ours is multifaceted. There are different dimensions to this God of ours. We have come to refer to these dimensions as different "persons" because each functions in such distinct ways.

As confusing as the Trinity can be, one aspect of it that I think is lovely is that it underscores that God's very nature is relational. This one God has these different entities which are distinct and yet come together to form a whole. Built into God's very nature, then, is diversity contained within the unity.

And then we can contemplate that as creatures made in the image of God, we too have been created with such characteristics as part of our nature. We are created diverse, yet called into relationship with one another, called into unity with one another. This one multifaceted God created one multifaceted creation.

As the creation story in Genesis reveals, we humans were made already as part of integral relationships. Male and female were created at the same time. And we humans were given a special relationship with the rest of creation: to be caretakers of creation. That is what having "dominion" over creation means. It means we are to be stewards, caretakers of our natural world.

But we have had a hard time living faithfully in these relationships of life. When you stop to think about it, all sin really comes down to a failure to honor or respect our relationships. We sin when we fail to honor or respect our relationship with our own bodies and souls. We sin when we fail to honor or respect our relationship with other human beings: our family, neighbors, colleagues, and peoples around the globe. We sin when we fail to honor or respect our proper relationship with God--when we put ourselves into the position of Creator, when we turn from who God made us to be.

And one other area of sin, one relationship we have failed to honor or respect, is our relationship with the natural world. In the early eons of human history, tribal peoples of the world had a greater sense of reverence and respect for nature. They saw themselves as part of creation, as united with the creatures and ecosystems of the world. But as humans modernized, there grew a sense of alienation with nature. The natural world became something we humans felt we needed to conquer or combat. And then, once we felt we had sufficiently conquered nature, it became something we began to exploit for our own purposes and profits. A gulf grew

between us and the rest of creation, and we came to regard ourselves as separate from the natural world, above the natural world. Our interactions with nature were more detached. And we regarded the natural world as something put there for us to use as we saw fit.

But this attitude has been very damaging. It is damaging because we have adopted a theology that is really idolatrous. We have behaved as if we were the Creator, the over-lord of all creation. That is not our rightful place. This attitude toward creation is also damaging because it has distorted our proper relationship with the rest of creation. Think about any relationship you might have with another individual. That relationship is not a healthy one for either party if one of the players is selfish, uses the other for his or her own purposes, devalues the other, regards the other only as a commodity or as ends to self-enrichment.

This is how humanity has treated this planet and its ecosystems and its creatures in recent centuries. And it is a sin. We have distorted our proper relationship with the rest of creation. And now, and now, this attitude has threatened the very existence of life on this planet. Scientific fact, facts that are universally supported by scientists around the globe, show clear evidence that the climate is rapidly changing due to human behaviors. This is not an idea or a belief. It is a truth supported by evidence. And it is clear that failure to act on this truth, failure to change human behavior, will be a disaster for the entire planet. The most vulnerable of God's creations will be the first affected--and many already are. Poor peoples of the world are already being adversely affected by climate change. Animals and plants in wide ranging ecosystems are already being affected. But in time, in time we *all* will be adversely affected in ways that are far more serious than simply enduring an especially warm summer or an unusually mild winter. Crops will fail. Ocean levels will rise. Economies will suffer. Natural disasters will destroy

communities. Food shortages will take place. International relationships will grow tense. Conflicts will erupt.

This problem, created by humans, must now be solved by humans. And it must be addressed in significant ways that go well beyond superficial efforts. Caring for the earth can't just entail picking up trash from our roadways, turning off lights in our homes, and planting some trees. All of these are nice efforts but to really address our major environmental crises will involve changes on the large scale involving industrial practices, the kinds of cars we drive, the kinds of homes we build, mining policies, and the protection of habitats on land and sea.

The scope of our environmental crisis and the urgency with which it needs to be addressed make the recent decision by our president to pull the United States out of the Paris Climate Accord all the more distressing. The environmental crisis we face is not only a political issue--it is a theological one. Religious communities of all kinds raised their voices in the wake of the president's decision to leave the Paris Accord. Roman Catholic cardinal Cupich of Chicago stated that "failure to protect the earth is not just a failure of leadership. It is a moral failure." He stated it is a moral failure because what is at stake are matters of life and death. And it is the most vulnerable of God's people who are in the most jeopardy.

On this Trinity Sunday, we recall that this multifaceted God of ours is one, and that God made this multifaceted creation to be one, to be united. As people of faith, there is no choice between Pittsburg or Paris, just as for those early Christians there could be no choice between Jew or Gentile. God made us one. We cannot stand apart from brothers and sisters around the globe nor can we stand apart from the created world of animals and plants and their ecosystems. We are inter-related, we are bound together.

To honor God is to respect and honor these relationships between ourselves and other human beings and between ourselves and the natural world. And honoring such relationships means working to heal these damaged relationships. When any of us have hurt or damaged a relationship with a friend or family member, we have to do some work to repair it. And so we must put in the work to repair this damaged relationship with our created world. Smiling pleasantly and speaking kindly to a hungry person on the street is a good thing--but clearly it is not enough if we let them remain hungry. And in a similar way, more profound acts of goodness are required of us to make the relationship right between ourselves and the natural world. We are needed to support policies that will bring healing to this relationship, to raise our voices on behalf of our planet's welfare, to vote in ways that will ensure care for creation, and to be open to changing our lifestyles and our habits.

Of course, none of this is easy. However, here is a hopeful thing to consider. God didn't just create the world and then walk away. We believe in a God who is still creating. And one of the things I believe is that God is creating you and me to become people who honor and care about our relationships in life. That is something God is actively creating: this awareness within us, this concern within us, this compassion within us for others and for our planet. Just as on that first day of creation when God made the sky, the stars, the planets, the animals, the seas, God now God creates new growth within our hearts and minds. And God saw that it was good.