

'In the Chaos, the Spirit Led Word Brings Order'

Based on Genesis 1:1-4, 2 Corinthians 13:11-13, and Matthew 28:16-20

Delivered on Sunday, June 7, 2020, Absecon Presbyterian Church by Drew Mangione, pastor

"When they saw Him, they worshipped Him, but some doubted." (Matthew 28:17 NRSV).

Friends, we live in a world filled with doubt, in a world where so many think that doubt keeps them from knowing the love of God, the one who gives everything for them. Jesus said all authority in heaven and on earth is His. God entered into our human condition to live, die and rise again for us and our salvation.

We are not to be peddlers of certainty and exclusion, but to give a place for love and doubt, comfort and welcome, to a world that too often sees chaos and the powers of this world bringing order with more sin and chaos. When the Roman Empire crucified Jesus, the cross was a symbol of order. It was a means by which people were brought in line, made to feel peace, only in so much as everyone was in fear of the Roman authorities. If everyone is in fear, it is easy to have something that looks like peace – but God's Kingdom is upside down.

Jesus came and submitted to the world's powers. He was crucified by those powers. He was forsaken by those who had just called Him King a week earlier. Today, is the day we celebrate Trinity Sunday. Paul tells us today that we are to celebrate and to put things in order, strengthen one another, think the same way in regard to the good news, and be at peace, because in this, God will be with us. One of those orders for things, is the identity of God in the Trinity, revealed in scripture.

Last week, we saw the Holy Spirit poured out upon the Apostles and the disciples sending them out in the world. Today, when we celebrate God in three distinct persons, yet one God, we see the Father, the Source of all things, with the Son, the Word – God's voice and identity – and the Spirit, the very breath of God, the energy that gives life.

The Trinity is inherently a mystery. It is one that if we unravel too much it leads us into a temptation to take away the uniqueness of each person, or on the other side, make them too distinct and make the Father, Son and Spirit into three separate gods. But if we don't ponder these persons of the Trinity at all, we risk making God into either a formless and distant entity, with whom we give up any effort and walk away. Or we go the other way and make God into the God we personally want, where we impose our own order the being of God, to match what we already believe, our ways, our priorities, creating ways to exclude others from God.

In today's first reading from Genesis, it says God created the heavens and the earth, seemingly from absolutely nothing, and then that the earth – all of creation – was still just formless, a void – nothingness, except maybe matter. It says darkness covered the face of the depth of some substance, and then came the Spirit, the breath of God, over the water, and then the Word came and brought light.

Here we see the Trinity on the first page of every bible. It doesn't outright say, "Here is the Trinity" but it is there, because it reveals for us is a God of power, and a God of relationship – a God who is

self-giving love. In the ancient near east, these ideas of formless, void, the darkness and the waters, which represented chaos, were deeply ingrained with mythological expressions of chaos and disorder because these things were feared by people in that age.

We still feel very uncomfortable about chaos and disorder, about change and about things not being the way we want them to be. But what we see in this text is God's Spirit hovering over those feelings, hovering over those realities, and turning them into something new – some thing with beauty and with order. But the order is not what the world always seeks to order things by. We seek to order by power, wealth and popularity, so many things that become false idols. God's world is ordered by humility and love.

This we see in God loving us enough to enter into our human condition, to share in our humanity, to live, die and rise again for us. This good news is incomplete if we look at it solely as a ticket to get us into heaven and away from this world. This good news is not barcode Christianity, as Dallas Willard called it, where we get scanned so that we get into heaven. No, that is incomplete. We are not scanned for our faith and sent to heaven. The gospel calls us to join the Spirit, to be filled by the Spirit, to be the temple of God's presence. It sends us out into the world to spread God's Kingdom and make disciples by teaching what Jesus taught, both by speaking it to others and by living it. We are to be a force for reconciliation, by seeing the pain in our world.

We see chaos caused by the Coronavirus in our world and the feeling of being bound up, feeling like the cure, or at least what we are trying to do to keep the virus unleashed, feels worse than if it was. But the fact of the matter is that 105,000 loved ones in our country have died because of this virus and every one of them matters. Every single one matters.

Where is the Spirit in this chaos? What is the Spirit going to do with us? What will we bring out of this time in isolation? What lessons will be learned? We have discussed this in past weeks, but it continues to be something we have to think about. Where is the Spirit leading us out of this?

Then we have seen exposed an underlying chaos that has been there all along, but now needs to be addressed. That chaos is caused by the sin of racism. When God created all things and called them good, it is sin that seeks to bring back the formless void, the chaos that God had ordered. That chaos is underlying because racism is present, with all forms of elitism, where someone thinks they are better than someone else.

The church is not immune from this. We in the church have permitted people to harbor these tendencies, not only with race, but also based on our own superiority of faith. While I do and will never deny that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life – definite articles “the” in all three – the Kingdom that Jesus established is an upside down Kingdom where love and humility comes first.

We must remember this when we see the pain of racism in this world and not answer hate with hate. We also must not seek to bring order for the sake of order, but see where God is leading us to be a part of a reordering of things in the right way that is led by love and humility, led by listening.

Our desire should be that when the outside world looks at us, they will not see hypocrites. When we have this proclamation of a Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations, we must lead with love and humility, so that the world will look at us and respond, “You are not hypocrites.

You do lead with love and humility like the Jesus you follow. You do practice what you preach. This Kingdom you proclaim is one that I will join you in.”

When we use the world’s ways to do God’s work, or when we claim to be doing God’s work but are really promoting the world’s power, it only exposes more and more hypocrisy. So, as it looks like pieces are falling to the ground around us in chaos, let us pick them up and rebuild in a way that makes sure the world knows that the lives of our sisters and brothers, people of color matter to us. Each one is a life that matters.

At the same time, let us also show that we care about those in the unenviable position of trying to be a police officer in this world as well. In doing so, we need find a way to express God’s love and to confess our sins of racism and confess our use the world’s ways. That is what will lead to reconciliation and a true revival and evangelism. That will lead to the Great Commission being something that we want to do because we want to do because of church growth, but something we actually do out of love for others.

The world is watching right now. One of the ways the Spirit is moving in this time of isolation is that we have seen all of these churches flooding the Internet with the gospel, the good news. Now it is up to us to not just proclaim it, but to live it. We are not to just say, “I am saved,” but participate in God’s work to save the world. God is bringing a new creation and it starts with each and every one of us. When there is chaos, the Spirit is hovering over that chaos to bring order, by the Word of God, who is Jesus Christ. Amen.

Word Search Puzzle

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words in a straight line in all directions

D I R E C T E D H H R D D E A
E M G F O G J G E T E I O E L
A O I A T N E W A I M S U L W
R U V T H I S W V W E C B I A
T N E H O H U O E M M I T L Y
H T N E L T S R N B B P E A S
E A D R Y Y B S A C E L D G A
R I D O T R A H M A R E T S W
O N U M I E P I E M O S N O H
F E S A R V T P V E M O W B I
E V P K O E I E A E I W E E C
R E I E H T Z D H T W O H Y H
E L R V T H I T A L L N T E T
H E I S U E N N S A I D T H N
T A T R A Y G G N I H C A E T
D E D N A M M O C B U T M I H

Words in the puzzle are printed in ***bold italics***.

(*Matthew 28:16-20 NRSV*) Now the ***eleven disciples*** went to ***Galilee***, to the ***mountain*** to which Jesus ***had directed*** them. ***When*** they ***saw him***, they ***worshipped*** him; ***but some doubted***. And ***Jesus came*** and ***said*** to ***them***, "***All authority*** in ***heaven*** and on ***earth*** has been ***given*** to me. ***Go therefore*** and ***make*** disciples of all ***nations***, ***baptizing*** them in the ***name*** of the ***Father*** and of the ***Son*** and of the ***Holy Spirit***, and ***teaching*** them to ***obey everything that I have commanded*** you. And ***remember***, I am ***with you always***, to the ***end*** of the ***age***."