

**In Our Image**  
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**Genesis 1:1-2:4a**

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

<sup>6</sup>And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” <sup>7</sup>So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. <sup>8</sup>God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

<sup>9</sup>And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. <sup>10</sup>God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup>Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. <sup>12</sup>The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. <sup>13</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

<sup>14</sup>And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, <sup>15</sup>and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. <sup>16</sup>God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. <sup>17</sup>God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, <sup>18</sup>to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup>And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” <sup>21</sup>So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup>God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” <sup>23</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup>And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. <sup>25</sup>God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

<sup>27</sup> So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup>God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” <sup>29</sup>God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup>And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has

the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. <sup>31</sup>God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

<sup>1</sup>Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. <sup>2</sup>And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. <sup>3</sup>So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

<sup>4</sup>These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

### **Matthew 28:16-20**

<sup>16</sup>Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

In our very first reading, first this morning and first in the whole of the Bible, we have the conundrum of the trinity in full force; trinity, a made-up word, like so many are, coming from the prefix for three, “tri-,” and the word “unity,” created by early forefathers of our faith as they tried to explain who it was that they worshiped and followed and believed in without looking like polytheists. They did not understand themselves as worshiping three gods, nor did they want others to mistake them for doing so. In our reading in Genesis, God speaks of God as “us;” our narrator speaks of God as he - three AND one, same God. Although Genesis does not name God as Father, Son, and Spirit, present in the act of creation, all are present nonetheless. “God created” and “a wind from God swept” and “God said.” We recognize God the Father in creation but the Spirit has being in the wind, or *ruach*, meaning breath and wind and spirit in Hebrew. And Jesus’ being is revealed as God speaks, for, as John tells us at the beginning of the gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This verse in John is offered where the nativity is told in the other gospels; while a baby Jesus had a beginning in this world through birth, Jesus our God has been around since before time, existing always with God, the Father and Holy Spirit. As God speaks and creation comes into being, Jesus the Word brings the created world into existence. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all have parts in creation and without participation from each, creation could not be completed.

This idea of trinity is a true mystery of our faith for we must take on faith God as three and God as one, without proof, without mathematical formula, without scientific logic, just as through our faith we believe that Jesus was 100% God and 100% human, not 50/50. Truly God is greater than our understanding, greater than the workings of our brains, and so we rely on faith. God is both one God and three persons. When I take the highway up, I drive down White Rock on my way to the church.

Each day I pass a yard with a small garden and handmade signs in the garden; one sign reads “God is hope,” the other reads “God love you.” Now my grammatical, logical self thinks, “Oops! They’re missing an ‘s’ - it should read ‘God loves you’.” After all if God *is* hope and not God *are* hope, then God *loves* you. And maybe the sign does include a language error but theologically, well, theologically, the sign has it right. God is in three persons, all of whom love *you*.

In our understanding and familiarity of God as the only God, it is right to our ears that “God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” What catches us off-guard is God’s own statement, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...” If God’s image and likeness reflects the three persons of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, what does that say about us? Let us look together at what we have been called to do, what responsibilities have been given to us, through our readings today.

The very first thing God says after creating humankind is that we are to have dominion over all creatures. Now, to some, dominion has meant power over, a wielding of control for our own desires. The Hebrew word for “dominion” most closely translates to “rule” or “govern.” How is it that God rules? Is God’s kingdom a forceful dictatorship, with the subjects as pawns, as property to be used as desired? Not at all. God’s rule holds above all else our free will, giving us, as a gift, the freedom to choose to follow and serve God if we wish, and not out of obligation but because of gratitude for the blessings God has given. God provides guidelines to keep us safe and to provide comfort through order. Jesus came to make clear who God is in relation to us, a parent, one who provides for children, one who loves children, one who disciplines children so that they might know how to live with discipline and an understanding of right and wrong when they grow. God as parent is not a parent who abuses, takes advantage, manipulates, demeans, terrorizes, abandons, or otherwise hurts children. God nurtures, God comforts, God cares for us. With dominion over creatures, as those made in God’s image and likeness, we are not to behave badly and ruthlessly to the animals which God has also created with love and tenderness.

God then commands us to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.” It is important we remember that we were made in God’s likeness; like God, not the same as God. As we recalled in our call to worship from the eighth psalm, God has made us a little lower than God. We are similar but separate. So, when we hear “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it,” we can certainly take this at face value and understand it to mean that we are to create more people, filling the earth and bringing it under our control. And to some extent, we would be interpreting this correctly. In the agrarian society of the Israelites, the more you had of people and land, the more you were blessed by God. They understood that God would want you to show how much God has blessed you. And, yet,

like I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, the Bible must be read in context of the whole. Today's reading from Matthew certainly adds dimension. "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it." "Go therefore and make disciples...teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." God could not have meant only that we were to produce offspring; according to the biblical witness, even Jesus did not have children. Some never marry. Some are unable to bear children. Some choose not to have children. Yet we are all still able to be fruitful and multiply. Think back to last week - the Holy Spirit allots gifts, fruits of the Spirit, to each as the Holy Spirit chooses. One way of being fruitful is to live fully into those fruits we have been given, those gifts we have been given that make us uniquely us, and yet still in God's image and likeness.

In another way, Jesus tells the disciples to make disciples and he then explains what is expected of the disciples. This means the instruction to the early disciples applies, also, to us as descendants of those disciples. In so following the command to make disciples of all nations, of all *ethne*, of all non-Jews, we are indeed being fruitful and multiplying, working towards filling the earth. And how do we subdue it? Through levees and dams and irrigation and controlling the deer population? Through setting aside national parks and state land and taking part in conservation projects? There is definitely a matter of working with the gift of our minds to find ways to magnify the resources of the earth, so long as we do so in a way that does not, in turn, create harm greater than the good or promote greed for ourselves over generations to come. Think, though, to the Lord's Prayer which we say together each week.

"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We are commanded to make disciples and teach them all that Jesus has commanded. And his commandments are these: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "Love your neighbor as yourself." To subdue the earth, to make the earth subservient, in light of bringing about God's kingdom here on earth, we can teach others how to love God and love one's neighbors. If the earth were to be filled with disciples living each day to bring about God's will and kingdom in this way, surely the earth and all her inhabitants would be subservient to God.

Teaching in the likeness of Christ involves compassion and patience. Too often, when we read of Jesus correcting, even rebuking, the disciples for their lack of understanding, we apply our own impatience, our own superiority, reading in a tone of scorn or disdain. [*scornfully*] "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?" not [*compassionately*] "Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables?" If we remember in whose image we have been created and teach with love, in so doing, we would be living into God's

image and likeness, not coercing and forcing through guilt but drawing out a response grounded in love for, and gratitude toward, God.

One last command remains from our reading in Matthew, from this passage known as the Great Commission. Once we disciples have made disciples, we are to baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. While baptism is a central facet of our faith, the word “baptize” is not where the import lies in this sentence. Of greater importance is that we are to do so “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Just as Christ brought others to God through the power of God the Father and the Holy Spirit, along with his own power, so are we to share in their power. All these responsibilities set before us - filling the earth, subduing it, making disciples, and teaching all that Jesus has commanded - these responsibilities are no small potatoes, as they say. In fact, it would be fair to say that tasks of this magnitude are near impossible, if not impossible, *without* the power of the triune God behind us. To live into our likeness of God, we accept and embrace our need to be in community and in communion with God and all created in God’s image and likeness to live fully into our callings; we accept and embrace our need to love and be loved by God and all created in God’s image and likeness. God is, above all, a relational God, with God’s self and with God’s created world. So, again, if God’s image and likeness reflects the three persons of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, what does that say about us? No matter what we do, whether it is having dominion over the created world around us, teaching like Jesus, or living into our gifts from the Spirit, we have been created to do all these things and more with one another and with God, our one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Let us pray: God of mystery, God of creation, God of relationship, help us to honor ourselves and others as made in your image and likeness. Amen.