

Mount Olive Lutheran Church
5327 W. Washington Blvd.
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
July 9, 2006
Job 38:1-11

“Creation in Three Parts”
by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

Introduction

The months following Pentecost are considered the season of the church in the church calendar. They are a time for teaching God’s people about their lives and about the truths of God’s word and his revelation to us. By the very nature of the readings for today we have a ready made lesson on one of the key emphases of the Bible: creation. Not only do they speak about creation but the lessons have a distinct emphasis as well on the work of the Holy Trinity. So our theme for this day is most fitting: Creation in Three Parts. Besides, this the hymn of the day which we just sang also complements these thoughts very closely. In fact, the first two stanzas are based upon the Old Testament lesson and the Gospel for today. And so the familiar words of the Navy Hymn will serve as a summary of each part of this message today.

May God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless our hearing of the Word today.

I. Eternal Father, Strong to Save ...

The subject of creation is one of great interest and debate in our day. Ever since the time of Charles Darwin, the western world has been divided between the believers in creation and the proponents of evolution. Most Americans still profess belief in creation according to recent polls, but their understanding is as varied and confused on this matter as on so many others. That this matter is of great interest can be illustrated by the fact that the day I left New York City last month, I picked up a brochure at St. Bartholomew’s Episcopal Church in New York advertising a discussion the next night on intelligent design. But what was interesting was that it was evident from the brochure that this lecture was to discredit such an idea because it posed a threat to evolution. That such a lecture could take place in a church says more about the current sad state of theology in this country than anything else could.

Now in contrast to that stands the words of the Old Testament lesson for this day. They are words of the Lord himself to Job. Job has been demanding answers from the Lord and now he receives one. But it may not be the answer he is expecting. *“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? ... while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment ... when I fixed limits for it ... when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther, here is where your proud waves halt.’”* The Lord is telling Job, when your understanding reaches to the limits of my creation, then you may speak. This is a good reminder to us in this age of science when we hear so often about

the great things we know and understand. Science will solve all our problems. Science will learn everything. Yea, sure! Science will be our god. Perhaps that is why there is such fear on the part of some to the disturbing thought of intelligent design or worse yet, creation. Because that would take things out of our hands and place them in the hands of God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Perhaps we need to sit quietly and listen to the voice of the Lord as he speaks from the storm, "Where were you?" And then in faith humbly reply, "I believe that God has made me and all creatures ..." Or as the hymn states:

Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
Who bids't the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep:
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea.

II. O Christ, Whose Voice...

In the Holy Gospel, we see the second person of the Holy Trinity in His creative role. Now Scripture teaches of course the presence of the Son at creation. As St. John's Gospel reminds us: "All things were made by him and without him nothing was made that has been made."

But in the account before us we see the creative power of the Lord Jesus in a remarkable way. In the Old Testament lesson, the Father speaks to the sea and says, "This far you may come and no farther ..." In the Gospel lesson, Jesus our Lord speaks in the midst of the storm to the sea and says, "Peace, be still."

The Gospel puts it very simply: *35That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." 36Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him.* The disciples, who were skilled fishermen and most assuredly accomplished sailors are clearly in charge here. They take Jesus along with them. Now it is clear from the latter verses that Jesus must have been very tired for he falls asleep on a cushion at the stern of the boat. The sailing is left to the fisherman who had surely done this countless times before.

And then the storm comes. Again the text is succinct: "A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat so that it was nearly swamped." In this simple sentence a great deal is said. Commentators and others have written about the sudden storms that often occur upon the Sea of Galilee, but this storm was ferocious. Even those seasoned sailors, the disciples themselves, are unable to withstand the onslaught of the wind and water. The waves are crashing over the boat. There appears to be nothing that will save them.

And so they turn to the carpenter asleep in the stern. They seek the help of Jesus. They woke

Him and said, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" And Jesus speaks two words. As the text relates: "He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, 'Quiet! Be still!'" Almost as a frustrated parent might speak an admonition to a couple of noisy children, Jesus speaks to the wind and the waves: "Quiet! Be still!" And as the text again says so simply, the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. Now here is where even we who would accept the events depicted here might well miss the full import of these words. Yes, indeed the wind ceased. But it often does that after a sudden squall. More importantly, the sea was calm. It would be interesting to ask a physicist to determine how much energy was suddenly dissipated to calm the waves which were moments before crashing over the boat. That just does not happen. Perhaps you have seen Lake Michigan hours after a great storm as the waves still crash. It was as if the hand of God was placed upon the sea. The Lord spoke and it was done.

And Jesus turns to his disciples and asks them, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" He is reminding them, "I am with you. There is no need to fear." But to that the disciples react with astonishment and great fear, "Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey him?" As we sang:

O Christ, whose voice the waters heard
And hushed their raging at Thy word,
Who walkedst on the foaming deep,
And calm amid its rage didst sleep:
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea.

III. Most Holy Spirit, Who Didst Brood ...

That brings us to the third part of our creation journey. And here the Epistle is most helpful. Now perhaps not in the same way, for the Apostle does not directly mention the Holy Spirit in the words, but His work is certainly there. And the creation the Apostle Paul talks about is not the creation at the beginning, the creation of six days, the creation of the heavens and the earth. No, but it is a creation nonetheless. Listen to the words of St. Paul:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

¹⁶So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.

The wonder of it all is that God the creator has loved us his fallen creatures so much that he has reconciled us in Jesus Christ. In Christ, we are a new creation. And the work of

regeneration, the work of the new creation is the work of God the Holy Spirit, who calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.

The same Holy Spirit who hovered over the waters in Genesis chapter one, is the Spirit who renews us by water and the word. What a promise is in these words. And the new creation is not subject to the bondage of death and decay. It is not bound to the second law of thermodynamics, that all things must run down. The new creation is one of life and joy and peace in Christ Jesus.

Conclusion

There you have it: Creation in three parts. And so we thankfully pray:

O Trinity of love and pow'r,
Our people shield in danger's hour;
From rock and tempest, fire and foe,
Protect them wheresoe'er they go;
Thus evermore shall rise to Thee
Glad praise from air and land and sea.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.