

Trinity Sunday, St. David's Episcopal Church, 6/11/2017 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

Last week, we celebrated the Feast of Pentecost: the Holy Spirit coming down and empowering the disciples. Everyone heard the sermon in their own language. Pentecost kicks off the longest season of the church year, the season after Pentecost, also known as ordinary time. We sometimes call this the "long green season," because our vestments and altar cloths are green for about six months; but we kick it off today with white, because today is Trinity Sunday. Trinity Sunday strikes fear into the hearts of preachers. It's the only Sunday dedicated to a doctrine.

I think you all know that I have just come back from a ten-day residency in Kentucky, where I'm pursuing a Master of Fine Arts degree in creative writing. One of the writers who came to the program this time was Charles Frazier, the Pulitzer-prize winning author of *Cold Mountain*. Frazier read for us a scene from that novel, in which a preacher and his daughter visit someone in the community who doesn't attend their church; and in the course the conversation, the preacher talks about the Trinity with this man.

Charles Frazier is a wonderful writer and reader, but I got tripped up at that point in his reading. I'd read *Cold Mountain* years and years ago when it came out, before I was ordained, and back then I hadn't thought about that particular scene. This time, though, all I could think about was, "dude, don't lead with the Trinity." That's *not* the way to share the good news.

Often, when we talk about the Trinity, we turn away from the scripture, the text, and instead turn toward metaphor. I'm sure you've all heard sermons, including from me, about the Trinity as a braid or a shamrock or a dance.

I'm inspired by my recent sabbatical residency, however, and its focus on poetry, so when preparing for Trinity Sunday I found myself looking at the poetry of Scripture, at the psalm chosen for Trinity Sunday, psalm 8.

Psalms fall into different categories, like laments and thanksgivings; and some are called imprecatory psalms, which mean cursing psalms. (We generally don't read those in church on Sundays.) Today's psalm is a hymn, or a song of praise.

The psalm addresses God both as our God with a personal name as well as a title, normally translated "Lord," but here "Governor." The psalm uses language that recalls the creation story. The second part of the psalm talks about the various creations on earth: wild beasts, birds, fish, and whatsoever walks in the paths of the sea.

I wonder how you all pray the psalm on Sunday mornings here at St. David's. We usually pray them responsively, trying to engage everyone actively, rather than simply listening to a reading. But I want to ask you, and you don't have to answer me, just think about it: when we pray the psalm together, are you truly praying the psalm? Are you thinking about the words, and connecting them to God?

Sometimes this can be challenging, especially some words like Governor. To some, “Governor” sounds political, so may not resonate as worshipful. There’s also a lot of male language in this translation, using the word “man” when referring to humans, people: all of us, including the women. Some of us, including me, can find such exclusively male language alienating.

There’s also a lot of language about “mastery” and putting all things under man’s feet, like sheep and oxen and wild beasts and all the creatures. This recalls the creation story, where God says to humankind, “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.”

One of the things I love about the psalms in the *Book of Common Prayer* is that they are heavily influenced by one of my favorite martyrs, William Tyndale. Tyndale was a priest passionate about translating the Bible into English, and doing it from the original Greek and Hebrew, rather than from the Latin translation that was used by the church at the time. Tyndale created his translations furtively, in exile, and was hunted down and executed for his efforts. He was executed under Henry the VIII, who eventually left the Roman Catholic church and authorized an English translation of the Bible, a couple of years after he had Tyndale killed for doing the same thing.

Tyndale’s translation was heavily used by the committee that created the King James Bible, and we can see his influence in our psalter today. The psalms that we read in church are not from the same translation as the rest of our readings. Those all come from the New Revised Standard version, but the psalms are from our Book of Common Prayer, which was heavily influenced by poor Mr. Tyndale. My point in all this is that while I am a huge Tyndale fan, some of the language in our prayer-book version of the psalms may get in the way of our actually *praying* the psalms. “Governor,” “man” and “mastery” might all get in the way.

Sometimes it helps me to turn to Eugene Peterson, who came up with a new translation, “The Message,” that consults the original Hebrew and Greek, but worries less about word order and instead more carefully captures poetry. I love his version of verses four and five in our insert. Listen:

“I look up at your macro-skies, dark and enormous,/your handmade sky-jewelry,/Moon and stars mounted in their settings./Then I look at my micro-self and wonder/Why do you bother with us?/Why take a second look our way?”

His translation of handmade sky jewelry, with moon and stars mounted in their heavens, shows us God as an artist. I think that artist piece permeates all persons of the Trinity. God, the creator, created the heavens and earth; and the beautiful reading we led with today, the opening of Genesis, shows God’s artistry. And Jesus was a carpenter. Carpenters are artists, aren’t they? Craftspeople.

The Holy Spirit is an artist as well, loosening the tongues and ears of all those who were gathered on Pentecost so that they could hear the message. That's a form of translation, which is an art—Tyndale and Petersen and other translators were and are artists.

Listen to Petersen's translation of verse six to the one in our insert this morning: "You put us in charge of your hand-crafted world, repeated to us your Genesis charge."

The prayer book translation is faithful to the words, but Petersen emphasizes the care that God the artist put into this handcrafted world that we inhabit, where we are stewards. Giving us dominion doesn't mean that we need to force everything to submit to our rule. We are charged with caring for this handcrafted world. God has entrusted it to us, and while we are living in it, we are to care for it.

The Gospel reading today is the Great Commission, where Jesus implores us, even the doubters, to go and make disciples of all nations. This is a way of caring for God's hand-crafted, beautiful world.

As we enter the season of ordinary time, how are we caring for this handcrafted world? How are we making disciples?

Here at St. David's, we have had to say good-bye to our preschool. Tomorrow we will honor our beloved director and teachers. Over the coming months, we will prepare the building for what's next. We're in conversation with an after-school organization, which could be a wonderful fit and a way to care for this handcrafted part of God's beautiful world.

In just a couple of weeks, we will have Vacation Bible School, making disciples out of young people entrusted to us, teaching them about Jesus and how much Jesus loves them.

We are also entering the last leg of our Beyond 50 campaign, caring for this building. Our shoestring budget has made it difficult to care for the building the way we want to as good stewards, and we are making great progress on that. We're in the final two weeks of that campaign.

Do stewardship and artistry sound like mixed metaphors? I see all of you as artists. Some of this might sound obvious, like Beverly Gallini with the mural out here, or her Vacation Bible School decorations; or the way Cathy Alonso and team decorated for today's tea. Our choir members, flower guild and quilters are obvious artists. But before Adrian DeRosa accuses me of being touchy-feely again, let me add that I see stewardship of the building as artistry: weeding. Fixing security cameras. Putting up the parish hall walls and taking them down.

Those of you who are parents are helping God create works of art with your children.

Our ministry is art. On Trinity Sunday, we use the same Spirit that empowered the disciples on Pentecost to follow Jesus' command to go therefore and make disciples of all nations. How will we do that? How will we together recreate and care for God's handcrafted world?