

June 25, 2017 • Baptism • Third Sunday after Pentecost



## **“In the Beginning, God”**

Sermon by Rev. Patricia Farris

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

*In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 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.*

*Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

*And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” 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. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.*

*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. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. 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. 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. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.*

*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, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.*

*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.” 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. God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.*

*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. 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.*

*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.” So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 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.”*

*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. 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.*

*God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

*Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. 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. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.*

*These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,*

In the beginning, God...the point is, it's all about God, about God and God's great unending, unfolding love for each of us, for baby Mia and her big brother, Caleb, for the whole creation and each and every creature therein.

You know, in these summertime days, a songbird has taken up residence in our backyard. He or she is singing away when I get up each morning, in sunshine or mist. Singing through the twilight until the first star appears and back again the next morning to begin all over again.

As the great religious teacher, Thomas Merton, wrote: “Sunrise is an event that calls forth solemn music in the very depth of our nature, as if one's whole being had to attune itself to the cosmos and praise God for the new day, praise God in the name of all the creatures that ever were or ever will be. I look at the rising sun and feel that now upon me falls the responsibility of seeing what all my ancestors have seen, in the Stone Age and even before it, praising God before me...When the sun rises each one of us is summoned by the living and the dead to praise God.”

“All nature sings, and 'round me rings the music of the spheres!” This IS God's world!

Praise God, whose faithfulness is new every morning. Praise God, who, in the beginning, created the heavens and the earth, and all that is therein. As the Catholic bishops of Japan put it: “to sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God's love and hope.”

To live joyfully in God's love and hope. This is our prayer, this day, for Mia, for her brothers and sisters in Christ in this congregation and all around the world. We long and pray for God's love to continue to unfold in her and throughout the whole creation.

A couple years ago, Pope Francis issued a beautiful and compelling encyclical, that is, a letter sent out to the church, called, in Latin, *Laudato Si'*, that is —“Praise be to you” from the Canticle of the Creatures of St. Francis of Assisi. We sing it sometimes, in the hymn “All Creatures of our God and King,” so it may be familiar.

SING Hymn #62 verses 1 and 3

“O sister water, flowing clear, make music for thy Lord to hear....Alleluia, Alleluia.”

Pope Francis reminds us that the sacraments of the church are intended to connect our material world to the holy. The hand that breaks bread, lifts the cup, blesses "is an instrument of God's love and a reflection of the closeness of Jesus Christ." Water, sister water, placed on the forehead in baptism is a sign of new life.

To help us make this connection today as we celebrate a baptism, let's go back over to the baptismal font for a moment. ...

Let me read the "Thanksgiving over the Water" from our United Methodist Book of Worship. For the sake of time, we don't usually read it, but it helps us make this connection between sister water and the presence of God, between the things of nature that we can see and hear and touch, and the work of the holy.

READ

For on the third day, God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together God called Seas. And God saw that it was good!"

Sister Water, the gift of life. Water in the Bible---the imagery begins in Genesis and the story of creation. The waters existed even before the light. Out of the cleansing waters of Noah's great flood comes new life and the promise of God's everlasting rainbow covenant. The people of Israel were born out of the parting waters of the Red Sea. Jonah, swallowed up in the belly of the whale, is brought back to life through the waters.

All through the Old and New Testaments, water is celebrated as a gift. I think that's because the lands of the Middle East where our Scriptures found voice are lands such as ours here in Southern California, desert lands where water is scarce and precious. It always comes as gift.

So when Jesus himself goes down into the waters of the River Jordan to be baptized by John, that scene contains within it all the creative, generative power of water. The cleansing, healing power of water. The renewing, restorative power of water that finally will emanate in his resurrection and triumph over death.

Whew. I bet baby Mia has no idea, yet, that today she's part of such a big deal! She's probably just happy to see all the people that love her so very much, or maybe she's just uncomfortable in her new dress, but we are all grateful to her this morning, because her baptism gives us all the opportunity to remember who we are, each and all of us, as a beloved Child of God. And not only that, to remember that through this water, sister water, we are intimately connected to all of creation, for we know that water gives life to everything and without it nothing can live.

And therein lies the rub, for with this awareness and empowerment comes responsibility. Pope Francis insists that how we relate to the earth is as important as how we relate to God and our neighbor. How we relate to the earth is as important as how we relate to God.

Oh, there's a lot of public debate these days about climate change and water scarcity and energy policies and land management and population density and new shipping routes through the Arctic as the ice floes melt away. Sometimes this is framed as a duel between science and religion, as if we have to choose one framework over another. But truly, this is not an either/or. As we noted on Scholarship Sunday two weeks ago, we United Methodists love God with our minds and find no contradiction between knowledge and faith. Case in point: we host Destination Science classes here for most of the summer. Isn't it great to see a sign at a church that says: "Be a science girl or guy. Always ask WHAT or WHY!" That sign alone witnesses that we are Christians who know what it means to "love God with our minds."

You know, Pope Francis himself was educated as a chemist before he entered the priesthood and eventually took on the name and theology of St. Francis of Assisi. He is both a scientist and a man of deep faith. And he calls the church into fruitful dialogue with all people of good will, whose distinctive approaches to understanding reality can be beneficial to all. No branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom, including religion, can be left out.

He writes: "If the simple fact of being human moves people to care for the environment of which they are a part, [we] Christians...realize [that our] responsibility within creation, and [our] duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of [our] faith."

Our duty towards nature and the Creator are essential parts of our faith. How we relate to the earth is as important as how we relate to God.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And on the sixth day, God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good.

So let's all renew our baptismal vows this day, and ask ourselves:

What kind of world do we want to leave to children, to those growing up after us?  
What needs does God's creation have of us?

And may God bless us all to sing the hymn of our existence, and to live joyfully in love and hope.

AMEN.

Notes:

Thomas Merton (1915-1968), *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Image, 1968) pages 282-283.

Pope Francis. *Laudato Si—On Care for our Common Home*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015.

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