

Trinity Sunday A
Genesis 1:1-2:4a
June 4, 2023

Ongoing Genesis
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

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 said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' 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 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 God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.' 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.' 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.' 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.' And it was so. God saw everything that had been made, and indeed, it was very good. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work and rested on the seventh day from all the work that God had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that had been done in creation.

As most of you know, I grew up in a big old house. Aside from being terrified of spiders, regularly attacked in the living room by bats from the attic, snakes in the basement, sweltering summers, freezing winters, and the fact that the house was a constant construction zone for 25 years, it was an amazing place to grow up! We moved in when I was 7 and I learned pretty early on that perpetual construction would be the new *modus operandi* in the Perrine house. Home renovation became almost like a family hobby. It was just what we did. And it never, ever ended.

The truth is, as I learned later, this is simply the reality of home ownership: old house, new house or anything in between. There will always be a project going on or one in the planning, and as quickly as we check something off the “honey-do” list, something else will take its place – that’s certainly the case with our 130-year-old home on Chestnut Street. Does this sound familiar?

According to Genesis 1, the earth was already a really old “house” when God started renovations. Scientists tell us that the earth may already have been 4 billion years old when dry land began to emerge over 1 billion years ago!¹ The author of the creation story you heard a few minutes ago, didn’t bother to tell us how the earth got here, only that when their story begins, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep while a wind from God swept over the water. If God was responsible for the birth of the universe, then God had already been going about the work of creation for a very long time when the Genesis story begins.

Using the simple metaphor of a 7-day week and the rich language of a seasoned storyteller, the author describes the continued painting of creation by the divine artist’s hand – light, atmosphere, land, seasons, plants, fish, birds, animals, and finally people – each new creation, a new color on the heavenly painter’s palette.

The late Hebrew Bible scholar, and my former professor, Terrence Fretheim, reminds us that, “Creation is not a sudden one-day affair; God

¹ “When the Earth Dried Out,” Sciencedaily.com, February 11, 2002:
<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2002/02/020208075438.htm>.

doesn't snap the divine fingers and immediately bring the creation into being. God takes time in creating: There was evening and morning, one day, two days... and given that God has been creating through the millennia, I wonder what number today is for God. Bringing the creation into being over time signals that creation is a dynamic process and not a finished product.”²

“A dynamic process and not a finished product,” he says. For us, who just celebrated Pentecost last week, we believe that the same spirit that entered the house in wind and flame to give birth to the church, the same spirit that hovered over the face of the deep and then called into the darkness “Let there be light,” that same spirit still hovers over the deep places of the earth and of our lives, interrupting our routine, and energizing us ever onward as a people and as a planet. Even the ever-expanding universe in which our little earth-home finds itself bears witness to the eternal truth that the act of creation is never done. It’s a dynamic process and not a finished product.

“Moreover,” as Fretheim says, “this [spirit] chooses not to take an ‘I’ll do it by myself’ kind of approach to creation. God catches up the creatures along the way to participate with God in ever new creations: let the **earth** bring forth; let the **waters** bring forth... Let **us** create humankind. God invites the earth and waters and microorganisms and you and me into the creative process.”³ When in the story God tells humankind to fill the earth and subdue it, it is not an invitation to grind the earth beneath the heel of humankind’s boots. It is an invitation to participate with the spirit in the continuing work of creating order out of chaos, of midwifing an always new creation, of participating in the ever-unfolding life of the cosmos.

Like an old house – like any house, for that matter – the work is never done. If we take the Genesis story seriously, perhaps not literally, but

² Terrence Fretheim. “Commentary on Genesis 1:1-5,” Workingpreacher.org, January 8, 2012: https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1097.

³ Ibid.

seriously, then we have a role to play in that ongoing work. I wonder, what does that look like for you, for me, for New England Church, for humanity? It looks like caring for the earth, certainly. But it also looks like building together what Jesus called the Kingdom of God: a realm of peace and plenty, equality and justice, opportunity and inclusion.

Many people in this congregation and our wider community have found their way of participating in this ongoing work creation by caring for those in our community who are most vulnerable, by working locally on environmental sustainability efforts, by stocking shelves at the Interfaith Food Pantry, helping working poor people save for home ownership, serving on the boards of institutions of higher learning, working with the Community Foundation to provide grants and scholarships, nurturing children through the Aurora Township Youth Center or mentoring kids at Greenman Elementary School, guiding youth as Confirmation mentors, and so many other ways.

What is your way of participating? How have you or will you join the spirit's work? As Fretheim says, "God's approach to creation was and continues to be communal and relational." Will we join the spirit in her work? I pray that our answer is "yes." May it be so. Amen.