

Sermon – June 4, 2023  
“In the beginning”  
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Genesis 1:1-2, 4a

*Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Be poured out fresh on us this day, filling open hearts and anointing the sharing of these words that they may be a blessing for your people, a blessing that continues our transformation into Christ's image and leads us to fruitful labor as we follow Jesus into his mission right here, right now. Amen*

Good morning! June 23<sup>rd</sup> is the summer solstice and the start of summer. That means that June 25<sup>th</sup> is the first Sunday of summer. Let's plan to celebrate the start of summer by getting out our Hawaiian attire and wearing it to church on Sunday the 25<sup>th</sup>. Hopefully, it will be warmer by then. Welcome to Trinity Sunday. We are moving through the season of Pentecost. If someone asks us what season it is or if you get into a discussion and someone mentions that it has been a cool spring and they are hoping for a warmer summer, then I want to encourage us to take advantage of the opportunity to share that we are looking for a Spirit-filled season of Pentecost. If that doesn't give you a chance to sow some seeds that might take root and grow into faith, I don't know right off what might. Trinity Sunday is the one Sunday a year when we seek to have a focus on the idea of one God as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The activities of God we find throughout scripture—creation, redemption, and the final reconciliation to God—are in a manner connected with the work of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We experience the activities of these persons in different ways. First, as those whose earthly lives

have an end, we come to understand our dependence on Another who is over all things. This is God the Father. When we fall into sin, we discover that we receive help from Another, one who is far off, who comes close and who was born of woman. This is God the Son. And when we seek in our inner self to respond to grace, the unmerited love and mercy of God, we are empowered or assisted by Another, the Spirit of God. These activities are our experience of the one God, our creator, redeemer, and sanctifier, the one God who is named in Scripture as Father, Son, and Spirit. <sup>1</sup> Don't expect that after today's sermon we will have a complete understanding of the Trinity. Do seek to be open to new insights into the persons of the Trinity and how they interact as shared with us through our encounters with the one God found in the scriptures. Watch for the three persons of the Trinity to emerge and interact as we hear God's word, read God's word, and come together to study God's word. If we will open our hearts to be guided by Holy Spirit as we look to God's word, we will find the three persons of the Trinity and their interaction throughout scripture. As we encounter them, we will grow in our grasp of the idea of the Trinity, one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. During the summer, we will be moving back and forth between the books of Acts and Genesis, looking together at God's interaction with our ancestors and at Holy Spirit's actions in the early church as it continued Jesus' mission to all people. Today we are looking at Genesis and part of the creation account in our Bibles.

As we consider the first words of the Bible, we have the opportunity to step into many debates about creation and how to understand the creation in light of our culture. I am going to stay out of those debates and point us instead to the first of the words of scripture: "In the beginning." Notice God is present at the beginning of creation. God is not part of creation. God is the creator. God exists prior to creation. The beginning is the beginning of what God creates. The description of what exists as God begins creation is a void, nothing, with darkness covering this void, yet there is the wind from God present in the void. We have that which is without form, that which is in darkness and chaos. John Wesley points out that God creates out of nothing.

Notice the way God begins creation. God speaks. The first act of God in creation is speaking the words, "Let there be light." And there was light! God does not experiment with light to get it correct. There is no indication of a need for practice. There is no repeating and improving. What God has designed comes into being as perfect. The words that follow creation

of light are that God saw that the light was good. What God intended has been accomplished. Light has arrived and pierced the dark, formless void, and, as light penetrates into the darkness, we find a separation between light and dark. The chaos that existed before God began creation now begins to have order, light and dark. Chaos is pushed back, and order begins to take its place, an order put in place by God. There is no morning on the first day. The day-light cycle is created, and morning begins after the creation of light, after the coming of light. I find Wesley's comments on these verses helpful. He points out that in heaven there is only light. By contrast, in hell there is only darkness, and on earth, by God's design, we have a cycle between light and dark, a cycle that is a constant reminder of God's providence. With the daily arrival of light, we are reminded of God's love. With the first act of creation, we find God seeing the result of His act of creation and seeing that it is good. There is no more work to be done to complete light. What God intended, what God designed, is complete. Light has come and it is good.

The cycle of creation continues for five more days. God speaks, creation occurs, and God sees the good of what is created. In Hebrew, there is a very subtle word play that is difficult to translate into English. The days of creation are not "the first day or the second day" as the Hebrew text is translated in order to be grammatically correct in English. Instead, the days are "day one, day two" ... until we get to day six, when we have the sixth day. The lack of the participle for the first five days of creation and its presence on the sixth day marks the sixth day as a special day of creation. The cycle of God's creation has brought out of chaos on the second day the waters of the dome, or sky, and the water under the dome. During day three, God has brought out of chaos the dry land and seas. On the dry land, God brings forth vegetation, trees, and plants. And God has again seen that they are good, and that chaos is pushed back. On day four, God speaks and brings forth the sun and the moon and the cycle of light that we know even to this day. And again, what God has done is good, complete. On day five, the cycle of creation brings forth the swarms of living creatures, birds of the air and living creatures and swarms in the waters. And on this day God gives purpose to living things, commanding them to be fruitful and multiply. And then we come to the sixth day, a day marked as different from the other days. It is not day six but the sixth day. On this day, out of the chaos God brings forth cattle and wild animals of the earth of every kind. And then God speaks and humankind is created male and female in the image of God and they are commanded to be fruitful and multiply, to 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. On the sixth day, God sees everything that He has made, and indeed it is very good. Chaos is removed. God has brought forth from nothing a complete creation that is very good and God has brought forth those who bear God's image, male and female, who are to be fruitful and fill the earth. The wind from God has become the breath of life in every living thing.

Listen to these opening words from the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." Here in the Gospel of John, John begins to speak to us about Jesus as the Word. The Word was present with God as God spoke and creation came into existence. Notice that what came into being in him was life and this is the light of all people. Remember the creation of light that separated the light from the darkness? Jesus comes as light for all people to shine into their darkness. And darkness cannot withstand the light. It does not overcome the light but is overcome by it. In John's Gospel, we find the repetition of the words "in the beginning." This beginning is focused on Christ as a new creation who is found as the Word made flesh who came and dwelt among us, lived with us, taught us, revealed the Father to us, and then died for us so that we might be reconciled to God. Jesus becomes the sacrifice needed for God's good creation to again begin to emerge. The kingdom of God begins to break into God's creation, a creation marred by the sin of humanity.

"In the beginning" also occurs within us. Because of our own sin, we do not have light within us, but darkness—a void, a formless place in our spirit that we try to shape and manage with behavior modification. We will fail to modify our behavior. When we accept Jesus as our savior, when we believe in him, we are given Holy Spirit, Christ present in us, and the light of God penetrates into our spirit. Jesus comes into our own darkness and brings light and life. The chaos within us is able to be ordered into what it should be, into what God created it to be. As we are recreated, as we are transformed into the image of Jesus and the dark stain of sin is overcome by light, we become our true self, the self that God sees and speaks of as very good. Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost and the flames from heaven began to spread and to light lamps of light within the souls of men, a process to which there is no limit for the followers of Jesus, who in turn start new lights that continue to allow the breath of God to enter in and bring

light into formless darkness. The persons of the Trinity are at work to order the chaos that reigns or resides in us. New ordering begins when we hear the word, when we encounter Jesus, and light shines into the dark, formless void within us that only God can fill. Holy Spirit, the breath of God, enters in and Jesus resides within us. As we grow into the image of Jesus, we move from being those filled with inner chaos to those whose lives are conformed to Jesus, who are ordered by God, those whom God sees as very good.

We come before God in Jesus' name through the power of Holy Spirit asking the Father to do a mighty work in us. We come first as those who struggle to bring order to our own chaos, and we cannot overcome the darkness. Yet when we look to Jesus, when we turn to him and surrender the inner chaos to him, we receive Holy Spirit power and light shines into our darkness, and the darkness is overcome. In the beginning God created. In the beginning was the Word. And in the beginning, light overcame the darkness within me, within you, and within us. Ask the Father for a new beginning, surrender our lives to Jesus and through Holy Spirit receive the breath of God so that light may shine into the chaos within us. And then go out of the church building to those in the world who still have inner darkness as a formless void and share the light we have received with them. Let us be those who are used by Jesus to light new lamps that shine into the inner darkness of others.

*Pray with me: Father God, we desire to be those who hear You speak and receive the light of Christ into the darkness within and have order brought to our inner chaos and your image in place of our false self. Come, Lord Jesus, and shine your light. Change us to be those who are remade in your image and then send us out to others to start new fires. We pray in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

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<sup>i</sup> Oden, Thomas C.. *Classic Christianity (Systematic Theology)* (pp. 126-127). HarperCollins.