

Created to Care

Presented June 4, 2023 by Darci Strutt McQuiston

Psalm 8, Matthew 20:16-20, Genesis 1:1-2:4a, and 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Hymns: Go Make of All Disciples, Pass it On, How Majestic Is Your Name

Good morning and happy Sunday to you! I am Darci Strutt McQuiston, a Lay Speaker from within this congregation and it is my joy to be invited into the pulpit today.

Each Sunday the lectionary selection contains four scriptures that share a sort of harmony. You have heard the Psalm and the passage from the gospel of Matthew. The other two not read were the creation story from the beginning of Genesis, and the Apostle Paul's closing remarks from 2 Corinthians. I'll sneak in references to those two as well as a couple others. It is also Trinity Sunday, the idea of God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. I'm going to share some of my ideas on that as well.

I have grand hopes for this morning's message. They are a bit ambitious, but I've been taught to set stretch goals. Here are my three points.

The earth is ours to care for, not to make use of.
Being prejudiced doesn't make logical sense, and neither does fear of death.
It's our job to share, shine, and save. (I enjoy alliteration.)

I'm not going to read the full passage out of Genesis. Being human, I'm just going to read the "day" that has to do with us humans.

Genesis 1:26-31 CEB

26 Then God said, "Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth."

*27 God created humanity in God's own image,
in the divine image God created them,
male and female God created them.*

28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground.” 29 Then God said, “I now give to you all the plants on the earth that yield seeds and all the trees whose fruit produces its seeds within it. These will be your food. 30 To all wildlife, to all the birds in the sky, and to everything crawling on the ground—to everything that breathes—I give all the green grasses for food.” And that’s what happened. 31 God saw everything he had made: it was supremely good.

There was evening and there was morning: the sixth day.”

I like this translation. We are to “take charge” of all the non-human inhabitants of the earth. Other translations use the word “dominion” or “rule” which makes me think of a king ruling over their kingdom.

God created and called it good, and then passed responsibility into the hands of humans. God created humans to resemble God to enable humans to take charge of what God created.

God is love. The part of us that is love resembles God. To me, that says we are to take charge and rule with love so that the creation God called “good” can continue to flourish.

Psalm 8:5-6 gives us the same gift and responsibility. Of humans it says:

*“5 You’ve made them only slightly less than divine,
crowning them with glory and grandeur.
6 You’ve let them rule over your handiwork,
putting everything under their feet—”*

We’ll sing part of this psalm as our closing hymn today. The handiwork of God is majestic indeed, and it is ours to take care of, or rule over. That is a responsibility we need to take seriously.

We are not doing a good job with our earthly kingdom. Google “the sixth extinction” and your heart will sink. Elizabeth Kolbert is the author of a book called *“The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History”*. Many articles are out there

based on her book which warn we are at risk of losing 75% of our animal species within 300 years. It is the first extinction event to be caused entirely by humans.

We humans often take a short-term view of risk and reward. We look at how our decisions will affect the world in our lifetime or the lifetime of our children. This is not what God meant by “putting everything under their feet.” We can and must do better.

Now on to my idea on how to understand “God in three persons”.

The passage from 2 Corinthians assigned for today makes mention of the three aspects of God.

2 Corinthians 13:13

13:13 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

The scripture we read this morning from Matthew calls out all three as well.

Matthew 28:19

28:19 Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

It is Trinity Sunday. I looked at many commentaries about this Sunday and nearly all said to ignore the whole “trinity” thing because it is confusing. I decided instead to share what I think about it because it gives me great hope.

In the end of March, I took the pulpit and said our body was like a race car. Some of you may remember that. My point was that as the driver, when the race was over, we didn’t cease to exist. We just got out of the car. Our body was a communication and transportation tool while we were here on earth, but it isn’t all we are.

In my Children’s message I talked about the body being like a radio and our spirit as the signal we are tuned to. That’s a simple way to look at it but take it up a step.

I see the body as a habitat. The more we learn about the human body the more we understand that is true. There are more nonhuman cells in our body than

human cells. We depend on our microbiome to help us process foods and keep us healthy. Our body is to our spirit as the earth is to our body. It's a place to live.

Here is my stab at understanding the mystery of the Trinity.

God entered human flesh and became a joining of God's spirit and a human frame. We call that combination Jesus Christ. Jesus was God in human flesh. That's how he could say in John 10:30, *"I and the Father are one."*

The Holy Spirit was the joining of the human and the divine.

Matthew 1:18 *"This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. When Mary his mother was engaged to Joseph, before they were married, she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit."*

God and Jesus are of one spirit.

We are created in God's image.

Genesis 1:27 *God created humanity in God's own image,
in the divine image God created them,
male and female God created them."*

It isn't too far of a stretch to see that as meaning we are a combination of spirit and flesh.

The second story of creation in Genesis gets a little more specific.

Genesis 2:7 *the Lord God formed the human from the topsoil of the fertile land and blew life's breath into his nostrils. The human came to life.*

God's first step was the creation of the body, what I'm calling the habitat, and second was "life's breath" to bring Adam to life. I believe that is placing our spirit into our habitat.

Why is this so important to me, you ask? I have been living in a time of grief so understanding "what's next" has become important. Seeing the body as a shell, whether you use the analogy of a car, a radio, or a habitat as I am today, makes it clear that we are not our body. Rev Dawn has often said that eternal life is now,

not after we die. I believe that strongly. Understanding our eternal spirit is present, right now, is what that belief means.

Knowing that...believing that...what logical basis is there for prejudice based on the body? The spirit doesn't have a skin tone. The spirit doesn't have a size or a shape. The spirit isn't male or female. The body is all those things, but the body is our habitat not our being.

That is my second point. There is no logical basis for such prejudice. Our spirit and our body are two different things.

If we understand our bodies as a tool for our time on earth, we can better understand there is strength in our diversity. My Bible study friend Deb referred to diversity like a good stew where you can see and identify all the individual components, and they blend to make something wonderful. I like that image.

I've been gardening like crazy the past few weeks and the diversity in my seedlings is important. I want some tall, some short, some blooming early, some blooming late, some that like sun, and some that like shade. I value each for the unique place they fill in my garden. Diversity is a good thing!

Believing the body is a temporary habitat for our spirit also means we should not fear death.

In our scripture today, Matthew 28:20 Jesus says, *"Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age."*

His body was no longer with them, but his spirit, the Holy Spirit, remains accessible to us. Our physical habitat doesn't just hold our spirit. We can invite the Holy Spirit to enter this human frame as well.

John 14:16-17 *"16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."*

Your body is a habitat that is linked to your spirit by some mystery of God's making. I believe it isn't a one-to-one link. The Bible says there is room to invite the Holy Spirit to share your habitat. Invite God in. In my radio analogy, tune yourself to hear the signal of God's voice. It is there for us all. Jesus gave us this gift. We will recognize it because it is saying everything Jesus said.

I know that's a lot to take in. I personally no longer have a fear of death. The approach of death is still not fun. The grief of losing a person you love is painful. I feel moved to do all I can while here on earth because my time here is finite, but also know there's something more. That gives me great comfort.

On to my final idea, that it's our job to share, shine, and save.

Our reading from Matthew contains a clear directive.

Matthew 28

19Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you.

I'm standing up here preaching away, and that is one way of responding to this directive. Another way is to let the love of God shine through you so brightly that it influences the people around you.

Love is energy. Energy vibrates. When one tuning fork is struck and you hold a second one next to it, the second one begins to vibrate with the first. Tune yourself to the Holy Spirit's leading and let that be the energy people around you pick up on.

It sounds metaphysical but you've no doubt experienced people that are so happy you can't help but be happy when you are with them. The same can be said of people who are depressed. You feel your energy fall when you are with them. It takes work to support those that need to be lifted emotionally higher because of this.

I've recently had two experiences that illustrate this "shining".

The first is from a stranger. I visited the Hudson Expo with my daughter's family. We did some shopping in the craft sale. There was a booth with water bottles beside a booth with jewelry and you could tell the two shopkeepers were friends. They seemed joyful to be together. My grandson was interested in a water bottle, so we lingered there. The person selling the bottles had several bracelets on her wrist, no doubt from the artist next to her. We chatted as strangers do, and suddenly she took a bracelet off her wrist and handed it to me. She said sometimes she feels moved to pass them to people and she had a feeling that I was such a person. It is a green bracelet with a silver charm stamped with a lotus flower. I look at it every morning and remember God loves me and give thanks for the person that passed that love my way.

The second experience happened just this week. I belong to an organization that has yearly dues. I missed the fact they were due and wrote an email to the treasure asking for an electronic way to pay them since I had hit the due date without remembering to send a check. Later that evening I received an email saying that my dues had been paid on my behalf. That was a moment of grace, unmerited favor, and love.

The bracelet was not expensive. I could have bought it. The dues were not expensive. I could have paid for them. Both being gifted to me was like feeling the warmth of the sun – S U N. Both acts of kindness felt like the teaching of the Son – S O N being put into action. The givers were shining with God's Spirit. Their gift to me was worth far more than the price of the gift.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:14 *"You are the light of the world."* Decide to be that spark and shine on.

The "save" part is a result of doing the first parts. Love everyone. Share this good news with everyone you love. Help them escape their fear and come into a place of love beside you.

This is the part I where get a little preachy, but I happen to be preaching so hope that's okay.

The earth needs humans to care more about healing it than they care about making money. Using poison to make growing crops easier saves money. Growing

food that also feeds the soil takes more work and the food is more expensive to produce. I am not a farmer, but I can support local farmers by investing through a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program. I can also shop organic. I am gardening organic myself and focusing on native plants to help the ecosystem, at least in my own yard.

There are programs out there that are working to heal the planet that you can support. It will take many people working together to help slowly change. Invest what you can toward healing our world.

Invest what you can in healing your own habitat as well! This human frame is also in rough shape. The same chemicals that are bad for the planet are also bad for the human body. Fast food is fast and less expensive than fresh food, but the ingredients within it are taking their toll. I agree that humans are causing the extinction of many species and one of the species that could go extinct is humans. Make taking care of your body, your personal habitat, an important part of your life.

Make the mental shift to release any prejudice you have against your fellow humans. The body is a shell so it's silly to judge based on physical characteristics. Earth is a training ground, so our thoughts are constantly growing and changing. Spewing hate toward a person for a belief that could change tomorrow is rather silly if you think about it logically.

I'm not saying evil and harming others should be excused or overlooked. Our laws that prohibit harming others are important parts of our society. Much of our current hatred falls outside that protection. Examine your beliefs in this area.

Invite God in to share your habitat. Jesus gave us this gift, but we need to unwrap it willingly ourselves. The painting of Jesus patiently knocking on a door comes to mind. Let that light of love in and then let it shine through you to the rest of the world. Share, shine, and save those in darkness.

John Wesley had three simple rules, "Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God."

Such a wise man! That covers it. Amen