

“We Are Not Trustworthy”

Genesis 1:1 – 2:4; Matthew 28:16-20

Genesis 1 [ESV]

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. **2** The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. **4** And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. **5** God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

6 And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” **7** And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. **8** And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

9 And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. **10** God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

11 And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. **12** The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. **13** And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

14 And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, **15** and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. **16** And God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night – and the stars. **17** And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, **18** to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. **19** And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

20 And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” **21** So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. **22** And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” **23** And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

24 And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds – livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. **25** And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

27 So God created man in his own image,

in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

28 And 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 heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” **29** And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. **30** And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens 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. **31** And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. **2** And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. **3** So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

4 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.

Matthew 28 [ESV]

16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. **17** And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. **18** And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore 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 observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Brothers and sisters, grace to you this morning, and peace to you, in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As many of you know, one of the functions of the liturgical calendar is to instruct God’s people in the faith of the Church. It begins with the first Sunday of Advent, in late November or early December, and the first half of the year follows the trajectory of Jesus’ life, passion, and resurrection. This is followed by His ascension into heaven and then, fifty days after Easter Sunday, the visitation of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, which we celebrated last Sunday. The second half of the liturgical year stretches from now until the last Sunday before Advent begins again. This is commonly called Ordinary time, or Sundays after Pentecost. It’s not as tightly tied to the Gospel narrative as the first half, and the scripture readings often focus on the Old Testament. Ordinary Time is also when we celebrate a few other important observances. November 1 is All Saints’ Day, when we remember and give thanks to God for those who have passed into the church triumphant over the previous twelve months. The last Sunday of the year is designated Christ the King Sunday, when we celebrate the certain hope of Jesus’ second coming to inaugurate the New Jerusalem and establish his reign on earth forever. Today, this first Sunday following Pentecost, is designated Trinity Sunday, when we recognize God in three persons and proclaim that mystery. On this Sunday, perhaps more than any other in the church year, preachers tie themselves in knots trying to explain what is ultimately inexplicable – define what is ultimately undefinable – and consequently provoke confusion, prompt arched eyebrows, and move some congregants to quietly ask their spouse to please wake them up when the preacher’s done. Add to this the puzzle of

today's scripture readings. Although Christ's commission to the disciples at the end of our gospel reading clearly lifts up the triune God by name – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – I have no idea why the Church chose for today's Old Testament reading the entire first chapter of Genesis. But it is what it is.

Every attempt I've seen or heard to define the Trinity quickly veers off into the land of bewilderment. You may have gotten the email that Bettie sent out yesterday with the link to a delightful little animated short on YouTube produced by the Lutheran Church. It's entitled "[St. Patrick's Bad Analogies](#)," and it consists of two little Irishmen challenging St. Patrick to explain the Trinity to them in easy-to-understand terms. It's less than four minutes long and a very funny little piece, but one that always makes me feel better about not knowing how, exactly, to define the Trinity. But it got me wondering whether, perhaps, the impossibility of fully comprehending the Trinity might not be part of the message God is trying to send us? What I mean by this is, might God be using the ultimate mystery of the Trinity to help wean us off the bottle of "understanding" and "definition" and "explanation" that is an obstacle to faith for so many people? We see a similar dynamic at work in the Law. In Romans and Galatians Paul explains that God's ultimate purpose in giving us the Law was not to show us how to behave, but rather to show us that we could not behave. The Law proves that no one can satisfy the Law, that no one can fulfill the demands of God's righteousness, and that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. This proof is what convicts us of our need for God's grace. And so getting back to the Trinity, might the mystery of the Trinity – which resists all human attempts to explain or understand or define – actually be the tool God uses to dissuade us from placing so much emphasis on explanation and understanding and definition?

This is not to say that explanation and understanding and definition are useless, or even unfaithful. Some of the greatest insights into the Christian faith have been made by people with profound understanding and great facility for explanation. And yet the enemy can use such insights to lead us away from faith. How? By persuading us to have faith in our own understanding – rather than in the person of God. Indeed, this is the original sin, which is illustrated in the very next chapter of Genesis. We all know the setup: God has forbidden Adam & Eve from eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, saying that if they do so, they will die. Then the serpent tells Eve that they will not die, but actually become like God. Verse 6 of Chapter 3 contains all the elements of the original sin. We read,

6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Eve was faced with a choice. She had been presented with two possible actions. And how does she respond? She takes it upon herself to analyze the situation. Which is to say, she decides to trust her intellect and her judgment. How do we know this? The scripture plainly tells us that Eve 1) saw that the tree was good for food – that is, it bore fruit that appeared to be nourishing, 2) saw that it was a delight to the eyes – that is, it was not misshapen or diseased, but healthy-looking, even attractive, and 3) that it was to be desired to make one wise – that is, the fruit would confer benefits upon those who ate it. Where did these evaluations come from? Well, from her own mind, of course. If you were to ignore everything before this verse, and look only at Eve's analysis, then her actions make complete sense. There is nothing irrational or foolish about her thought processes. And so, because she was not irrational, and because her analysis clearly

lifted up eating the fruit as the more desirable option, she went ahead. And of course, we all know how things turned out.

St. Augustine, in the fourth century, and later St. Anselm, in the 11th century, embraced a method called, in Latin, *fides quarens intellectum*, which means, “faith seeking understanding.” This is a good and righteous use of our minds. The danger is that far too often, we neglect the first word – “faith” – and focus entirely on the next two – “seeking understanding.” Because when we focus on understanding, we quickly make it into an idol. By this I mean that if we don’t understand something, then we will not accept it or believe it. I’m not terribly familiar with how other people parent their children. All I know is how my folks parented me, and how Carla and I parented our kids. We love our children dearly, we want the best for them, and we want them to flourish and mature. Because of that, we give them guidance in that direction. We tell them to brush their teeth, to wash their hands before eating, to say please and thank you, to respect their elders – all that stuff. And for the most part they obey us. But there comes a time in every child’s life – it’s earlier for some, later than others – when they discover the tremendous power of a particular word. “Why?” Why do I have to do this? That question marks the moment when they stop accepting your authority, and instead start trusting their own understanding. It’s no longer sufficient that you told them to do something. They need to know how their doing that thing will satisfy or accomplish the ultimate objective. And we all know how this plays out. We can reply to their question in one of two ways. The first – which we all hated to hear as kids, and which I think all parents default to at one time or another – is, “Because I said so.” I’m the Mom. I’m the Dad. I’m your parent, and as such I have authority in this relationship. While this may work for a while, I think most parents ultimately shift to the second answer, which is to provide the reason for their directive. “Because if you don’t, then you will get cavities and your teeth will rot and you’ll need painful and expensive surgery.” We

want our children to understand that we are reasonable people, that our requirements are sensible, and we want them to agree with the logic of our requirements. But if we answer them this way, we yield our authority. We surrender our position as one who is to be obeyed, and instead set up human understanding as the benchmark by which our commands and our reasoning should be judged. This move transfers power to our children. At this point, they can raise some other consideration that challenges our command, or they can propose a different activity that would appear to achieve the same purpose. And if neither of these works, they can fall back on the perfect rejoinder to your logic: “I don’t care.” I don’t care. You, parent, have explained to me that I need to do this in order to satisfy this obligation. Well, that obligation isn’t important to me, so therefore I don’t have to do that thing. So then, filled with frustration and self-contempt because we went somewhere we knew we shouldn’t have gone, we end up going back to square one, saying, “Well, do it because I told you so!”

Indeed, we may have the very best intentions – they may even be perfect intentions. But when we invite others to employ their own intellect and reasoning in deciding whether or not to obey them, we surrender all of our rightful authority to their spurious wisdom and self-satisfying understanding. We do the same thing ourselves. One of the most infamous examples of this is known as the Jefferson Bible.¹ Our third president was a man of extraordinary intellect, and he brought that intellect to bear upon Holy Scripture. He sought to extract the “pure principles” that Jesus taught, believing that anything in the Gospels that were not Jesus’ words were misunderstood by the people who spoke or recorded them. Jefferson did not begin with fides – he did not begin with faith. He did not begin with, “I believe God’s Word.” Instead, from the very start, his own understanding

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jefferson_Bible, retrieved 6/4/23

was the judge of what was worthy to be retained. The moment we place our trust in our own understanding, we surrender our faith in God. We place our faith in ourselves. Even if we subsequently obey something in scripture, we're not being obedient. Instead, we're saying,

Oh – I understand this now. It makes sense to me. It comports with my understanding of reality and existence. Therefore, I will do it – not because God has commanded it, but because I understand it, and in my opinion, it makes sense to do it.

[5](#) Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

[6](#) In all thy ways acknowledge him, *and he shall direct thy paths.*

Corrie ten Boom –

When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don't throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer.

Only God is worthy of our trust. Only God is worthy of our faith.

What God has done – Creation

Crucifixion

Resurrection

Lord's Supper