

# Trinity Triangles

## A sermon for Trinity Sunday

Genesis 1:1-2:4a, Psalm 8, 2 Corinthians 13:11-13, Matthew 28:16-20

In the beginning there was chaos and darkness; Israel has been carried off into captivity, her people are surrounded by all sorts of stories from foreign countries, all sorts of other gods. There were creation stories:

from Babylon of Enumia Elish and Tamiet,<sup>i</sup> ;

from Egypt of Re,<sup>ii</sup> Osiris, Seth and Horus; and

from Mesopotamia of Marduk and Assur.<sup>iii</sup>

The results being that Jews were being drawn away from God. So by divine inspiration, some of the priest in captivity wrote Israel's story of creation by the One Living God. It was very different, one God as creator of all things, heavens, earth, water, land, light, sun and moon, and all life, and of course it was fiercely monotheistic<sup>iv</sup> And while it expresses the science of the day, it is primarily a theological statement focusing on God's intent not God's methodology.<sup>v</sup>

Terence Fretheim writes:

Israel takes the available knowledge of that world and integrates it with theological perspectives, recognizing thereby that both spheres of knowledge must be used to speak the truth about the world.<sup>vi</sup>

In many respects it's a story about relationships.

Perhaps because it's Trinity Sunday, but more likely because I've just finished this year's workshop on Family Systems and its emphasis on relationship triangles, that I'm seeing all sorts of relationship triangles today. The first is the triangle between Israel other gods, and God. The foreign stories are drawing Israel away from God, the introduction of a Hebrew creation story draws Israel back into relationship with God. It should be God and God alone, but because we've read ahead we know that doesn't happen.

The second relationship triangle is revealed in the story we read this morning. (By the way, a second follows written by a second set of authors.) This second triangle is between God, creation and Israel; or today, between God, creation and us. There are two key concepts I want to explore. The first is the image of God.

In the last half of the sixth day

*... God [says], "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; ... So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

Notice all humanity, male and female are created equally, in time and equally in the image of God. Other than radical equality of all people, what else does it mean to be the image of God? Roger Nam writes *it's elusive*.<sup>vii</sup> Over time our understanding has moved from an assigned role, to a source of sanctity and innate worth, to a 20<sup>th</sup> century vision of divine partnership.<sup>viii</sup> Walter Brueggemann notes a closeness that reveals God's attentiveness, and a distance that allows freedom of action.<sup>ix</sup> But it is Fretheim who writes of being created in the image of God to *mirror God to the world [as] ... an extension of God's own dominion*. He notes God's first words to humanity are about their, about our, relationship **to the earth**.<sup>x</sup> Being made in the image of God speaks to who we are, our relationships with each other, our relationship with all creation, and our relationship with God and the free will we have in all this. And thus we move to the gift of dominion.

Rādâ means to rule, to have dominion.<sup>xi</sup> It is authority of

*... masters over servants (Lev 25:43) king over subjects ... [but it] can be used for either benevolent or harsh rule. However, it must be understood as the same kind of rule God would exercise in the natural world, a world God created good in all of its parts.*<sup>xii</sup>

The second creation story reveals God giving the command to cultivate, literally to serve creation.<sup>xiii</sup> Fretheim writes *that it must be understood in terms of care-giving, even nurturing, not exploitation*.<sup>xiv</sup> Being created in the image of God

and commanded to take care of all creation as God's self would is an awesome responsibility, an awesome expression of divine love.

Genesis reveals a triangle of relationships between God and all creation brought into being with strength and desire no other creation story reveals; between God and humanity who, with extraordinary love, is endowed with God's image, and between humanity and all creation with freedom to be and act that mirrors the divine whose image we reflect. When this relationship triangle is in the balance intended created life is the resonance of the creator; it mirrors the internal relationship between God, Jesus and the Spirit.

Our concept of Trinity does give us a way to imagine the unimaginable life of God. More importantly it gives us the imagination to live the life we are created to live.

Trinity, relationship triangles, creation, Genesis,

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- <sup>i</sup> David Petersen L Petersen, Beverly R Gaventa, New Interpreter's One volume Commentary
- <sup>ii</sup> Scott Hoezee , This Week at the Center for Excellence in Preaching  
This Week's Article: Old Testament Lectionary Text is: Genesis 1:1-2:4a, <http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/thisWeek/index.php>
- <sup>iii</sup> Roger Nam, Commentary on Genesis 1:1-2:4a, [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2096](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2096)
- <sup>iv</sup> Nam, *ibid*
- <sup>v</sup> Walter Brueggemann, GENESIS  
A BIBLE COMMENTARY FOR TEACHING AND PREACHING, Interpretation,  
James Luther Mays, Editor  
Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Old Testament Editor  
Paul J. Achtemeier, New Testament Editor
- <sup>vi</sup> TERENCE E. FRETHEIM, THE BOOK OF GENESIS  
INTRODUCTION, COMMENTARY, AND REFLECTIONS, New Interpreter's Bible
- <sup>vii</sup> Nam, *ibid*
- <sup>viii</sup> Walter J Harrelson, New Interpreters' Study Bible
- <sup>ix</sup> Brueggemann
- <sup>x</sup> Fretheim, *ibid*
- <sup>xi</sup> Strong's Talking Greek & Hebrew Dictionary.
- <sup>xii</sup> Harrelson, *ibid*
- <sup>xiii</sup> *ibid*.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Fretheim, *ibid*