

**June 19, 2011: STUMP THE PASTOR: Trinity and Creation**  
**Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Matthew 28:16-20; Psalm 8**  
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The June newsletter made reference to upcoming Sundays as Stump the Pastor season. As I put up the envelope in fellowship hall, in which to submit questions for stumping, someone expressed surprise that I was asking for questions ahead of time. My questioner had thought that we were going to try stumping the pastor as part of the sermon. Which I suppose we could do. My motive for the envelope was to give folks a chance to consider questions to pose. In deference to my questioner's concern, there will be time during this sermon to field potentially-stumping questions. But first, some context on the subject of the Trinity and creation.

The problem raised by today's Genesis creation story isn't really "creationism versus evolution." This story in chapter 1 is only the first explanation of how the world came to be, quickly followed by a second, slightly different explanation in chapter 2. The people who wrote the Genesis creation stories were not trying to write a newspaper account of factual information. They were Jews, living as exiles in Babylon, and their situation didn't add up to their religious beliefs. When life doesn't make sense, it is appropriate to ask who and where is God. That is a religious act, an act of faith. The Jewish exiles did what people do to this day to make sense of tragic situations: they told stories about who they are and to whom they belong. The creation accounts in Genesis (both of them) are stories designed to help us hold onto life. In today's story, God intentionally creates, looks at what is created, and declares it all "good" and even "very good." What makes this story a little different than every other story of creation is that it so good, even the seasonal cycles are good, and not a punishment. Think of the ancient Greek or Egyptian stories that explain winter as the kidnapping of a beloved, how to get spring as the rescue of the beloved. This is about a creation so completely at the will and to the delight of its Creator, there is room even for the explanation we call "evolution." As long as we continue to remember whose we are.

The interesting thing about reading this story today (of all days) is that it's Trinity Sunday, a Sunday in which we celebrate doctrine. One way to understand doctrine is to know that it is the product of the experience of the Church. In other words, I'm working up to telling you that "Trinity" doesn't appear in the Bible. Yes, the Persons who make up the Trinity are referred to. Today's Matthew text is an example. But the three-in-one concept isn't Biblical, and wasn't totally codified until the Fourth Century, when the Emperor Constantine called the Council of Nicaea, which gave us the Nicene Creed.

Now, how does the creation story serve as a lesson for this particular doctrine? After all, Jesus hadn't even been imagined, let alone born and dead and resurrected, at the time it was written. Without doing too much violence to the Hebrew origins of the story, later Christians detected early understandings of the Persons of the Trinity in it. Remember, this is not a story of "how" creation comes about, it is a "who" story—who brings creation into being. As we begin the story, the *ruach* (the wind), the Spirit of God, hovers over the chaos. God is so creative, so fruitful, that God merely speaks the thing and it *is*. In other places in the Hebrew Testament, Sophia Wisdom is how God speaks the Word that creates. The gospel writer John calls that Word Jesus. Using the doctrine of the Trinity, the creation story sees God as speaker, the Christ as Word, and Holy Spirit as the "force" behind the Word that creates. Franciscan theology puts it this way: "Only a self-communicative God . . . could be a creator God. . . . The Word is the inner self-expression of God, the created order is the external expression of the inner Word. Creation flows out of the love between the Father and Son."

In other words, Creation is the ‘speech’ of God.<sup>1</sup>

There’s some context. What about questions? Our practice of Godly Play might be a way to frame some questions. As Marilyn and I planned the service, we discovered the richness of “I wonder” questions in unpacking meaning. For instance, I wonder what purpose the creation story served. I wonder what the difference is, between fact and Truth. I wonder if Trinity is more than human logic. I wonder if you have any questions.

### [congregation and pastor engaged in Q&A]

To me, the bottom line is Mystery. That doesn’t mean we shouldn’t wrestle with the questions or dismiss our doubts too soon. Even the disciples, faced in person with the risen Christ, doubted. The gospel today (at least in the Greek) says that they worshiped Jesus *and* they doubted. The Greek word (*de*) means both “and” and “but.” God knows we need mystery, so how do we live with the doubt it brings? By continuing to engage with it, I think, and remembering the Greek: they worshiped *but* they doubted; they worshiped *and* they doubted.

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<sup>1</sup> *Care for Creation: a Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth* by Ilia Delio, Keith Douglass Warner, Pamela Wood; St Anthony Messenger Press: Cincinnati, 2008, pp. 42-43.