



The "Pillars of Creation," an area of intense star formation, as seen by the Near-Infrared Camera of NASA's James Webb Space Telescope.

First Sunday after Pentecost: Trinity Sunday

Sunday, June 4, 2023

The Rev. Linda McConnell

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

What does it mean to have Dominion?

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; First - Please note the pronouns - the plurality - the trans nature of our founding story - the us-ness of the first chapter of our scriptures.

Second - Please note the grounding ethic of the entire scriptures that is noted here in the first chapter: "In our image" - We carry the seed of God, the glory of God, the image of God deep within our own nature. This is what it is to be human. In all our glorious diversity - we carry, in our bones, in our blood, in our memories, in our reason, in our skill, in our creativity, in our hearts and minds and souls, we carry the image of God.

Third: Please note that we who carry the image of God don't even get our own day. We share the sixth day of this account of God's creative outflowing with all the other "living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind."

Yep, we share our day with the snakes and the spiders and the magnificent wild wildebeests and the creatures who belong neither to land or to water, but to both - like the turtles and platypus. We, who are made a little lower than the angels, are extremely latecomers to the game. And we are just one among many.

But here's the verse that's the kicker and where we humans have gone seriously astray: "let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

It's this word: dominion.

We who are inclined to twist just about everything to make ourselves the centerpoint - rather than centering ourselves in God - have done a pretty bad job of this gift of mastery and dominion. We have had very little notion of how to carry out the glory and honor with which God adorns humankind that our psalm today points out:

you adorn humankind with glory and honor;

⁷You give them mastery over the works of your hands; *

you put all things under their feet:

⁸All sheep and oxen, *

even the wild beasts of the field,

⁹The birds of the air, the fish of the sea, *

and whatsoever walks in the paths of the sea.

But, my friends, we have gone seriously wrong believing that we are the reason for the existence of all the others. That the others are there to serve our needs.

We have acted as if the dominion we are given is for our benefit. It is the root sin from which all others spring - mistaking the purpose of power.

Diana Butler Bass writes: “In western Christianity, “dominion” has often been interpreted as power, mastery, rule, and authority *over* others in a hierarchical society. Dominion has been used to justify all sorts of religious crusades, pogroms, and genocides. It was twinned with “dominate,” inspiring the power-hungry with a biblical justification to conquer all the earth’s resources and peoples. After all, the scriptures say to “subdue” — as in to “hold in bondage” — creation.”

This interpretation is at the heart of both the idea that men should dominate their wives and children and that a one version of Christianity should hold first place in the ideals and policies of the nation - Christian nationalism, in other words.

But this way of thinking about these words “dominion and mastery and authority” is not the only way - and it’s definitely not the scriptural way.

Bass points out that Jewish commentators have had a very different interpretation of this word, dominion: they emphasize that “dominion” must be exercised within the whole of creation — not separate from it or as exploitation.

Christian ethicist Larry Rasmussen points out that the Jewish interpretation of this text is about “humble participation with God in ongoing creation as a totally interrelated reality, accompanied with a high sense of moral responsibility for consequences. We are *shomrei adama* — guardians of earth.”

And the whole of the Old Testament points over and over again to what a right use of power is, and what a wrong use of power is: The prophets speak God’s truth at the cost of their lives to the kings of Israel when they mistake their power of authority to be for the purpose of enriching themselves rather than for the purpose of serving the needs of the people.

The prophets condemn the rich when they act as if the poor do not matter, or when those with homes and creature comforts do not give succor to those without.

They recall for all that this power of dominion, the memory, reason, skill and creativity given to our species is for the purpose of serving and caring for all the other creatures and the land and water that flows forth from the creating word of God. As a Shepherd cares for

their flock, in other words.

It is the kind of power that will come to fruition in Jesus, the holy Son of God, who came on our behalf, to redeem us, rescue us, heal us, and who gave his life for us.

It is the power of the Holy Spirit, who fills us with grace and blessing for the purpose of pouring out blessings and grace upon others.

This power first spoken of in the first chapter of the Bible, this power given to those who carry the image of God is, as our Cursillo friends would say, the power of the servant.

It is the power of kneeling and washing and feeding and caring for. It is the power to create new worlds, new possibilities, new imaginations in which all are fed, all are housed, all are loved. It is the power to bring into being that which is not, and to lay to rest that which should not be.

It is for this that Jesus commissioned us - go into all the world, he said, and make disciples of all nations. Not dominate others, not subdue others into submission to our way of thinking and our way of living. But go out to create more goodness and fulfill our Lord's command to love our neighbors and ourselves and God with all our minds and wills.

Love creates beauty and peace. And beauty and peace begets beauty and peace. Love does not coerce or dominate or subdue.

And if we are confused about that, we have only to look to Jesus' life - who gave up his life rather than exercise his divine power to coerce rather than heal.

We have only to read the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians - If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. Love always protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres.

My friends, and our dear graduates - it is our glory and our honor to join with each other and our Lord in using whatever resources we possess to join God in creating beauty and order and love and grace and blessing out of chaos and darkness and the nothingness of

hate and twisted ideas about power. And it is our responsibility to ask ourselves whether we are serving the common good, or privileging ourselves above others.

Let us pray in the words of Pope Francis:

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference
that they may love the common good,
advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life
to prepare for a better future
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!
Amen.