

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole CA

Trinity Sunday/First Sunday after Pentecost: June 4, 2023

The Story of Genesis

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church on the first Sunday after Pentecost or Trinity Sunday. What we have presented here today is God the Creator in Genesis, the Holy Spirit in the Letter to the Corinthians, and Jesus with the disciples. And I think that is all I am going to say about the Trinity today.

What I am going to talk about today may anger some, or some may agree. For others, what I will share with you may be new information, but I think it important to our times. Just recently Pope Francis sent out several notices informing Catholics around the world that although we all have different faiths, we worship one God Almighty. In fact, rumor has it (as rumor does) that there may come an agreement between the Episcopal and Catholic Communions.

With that being said, and the worshiping of one God, it would be nice to understand where that God came from. From the Sistine Chapel painting of the white man with the beard reaching his hand out to the human being formed of the dust, to the Indigenous Peoples Great Spirit, we can only really know God from a human perspective.

There are many people today who would like to believe that God – the Almighty – Creator, penned our scriptures word for word with no bending. However, for me, the mystic, that doesn't quite work; as my experience of God through Holy Spirit

is that things come into your life with amazing timing, just as God would have it, the good and the bad.

Scripture is a living being as individual as the one reading it. In fact, if you read a passage on Monday, and then again on Sunday as I often do, it can have different meanings even though they are the same words. Because you are not the same as when you read them before.

Our scriptures were written, I believe, by God-inspired mystics. They were written in a time and within a culture. Thus they contain the wisdom of the ages within myths, stories, and historical events. God works in and through us. But who is our God creator, the one that even the Pope is willing to share?

As I am sure you are familiar with our Genesis reading, the one that introduces God the Creator, I learned a few things that I wanted to share. Historian, professor, and author Doug Linder concludes in his research that there were multiple creation stories in the area of ancient Israel that were told and shared generation to generation orally. During the time of the Jewish exile around 560 BCE the Jewish people needed hope to endure their many trials under terrible kings. The Jewish people needed to establish an identity so as to remain a culture even when separated from their homeland.

At the time of the exile there were two preexisting writings on creation. One used the term Elohim as the creator god and the term Jehovah was applied to the second writings.

It is thought that the writer, probably a High Jewish priest wove the two texts together to give the Jewish people an identity. Hence the general creation story followed by Adam and Eve's creation. One issue was that some of the writings had multiple gods and reflected a type of polytheism, so even today as edited, you can occasionally see some of the original mistakes depending on the translation.

This writer of what was previously oral stories for the Jewish people wanted to present a Jewish-centric religious spirituality that would support his people throughout history. He believed that his story would not be complete without an explanation of how things like the sun, the earth, the seas, and life formed and came to be.

The writer stresses the journey from chaos to creation, from nothingness into organized natural law. The Creator is presented as impersonal, almost force like, an energy that is woven throughout everything. A natural plan that makes sense and is, of course, good. Followed by a Creator who walks personally in a garden with his creation.

I believe it was the Holy Spirit that inspired this priest, and as we know these scriptures are the cornerstone of both the Jewish and Christian faith. But not without their controversy. There have been legal trials over what God actually did create and how long it took. As if anyone were there.

There are scientists who believe in God only because to **not** believe would give no sense to what they continue to discover - chaos into organized natural law.

But we also take it for granted that scripture is available to all. Everyone knows this creation story. But they didn't.

From the BCE era until the early church of the third century, this beautiful creation story that tells us everything God created was good, was only known by the Jewish people.

It wasn't until the third century as part of the high renaissance of Greek culture, that Pharaoh Ptolemy II summoned seventy-two Jewish scholars to Egypt to translate Genesis (and what we now know as the Old Testament) from its original Hebrew into Greek. That meant it was the first time the non-Jewish, non-Hebrew world would be exposed to Jewish history, their story of faith, and their culture in a direct way.

The work that these seventy-two men created is known by the scholarly world as the Septuagint. It is in the hand of the Greeks that the depth of the stories told would be explored not only as a history of a people, but as a literary and philosophical exercise in the whys and hows of a good life.

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them, God blessed them.

Words bound together by God's inspiration to carry generations through tough times. Words that carry a beauty every time they are read. Words inspired and spoken from our creator, telling us that what he saw was good. From chaos into organized natural law. This is the way God works until the end of time. Amen