

**Genesis 1.1—2.4a**  
**Matthew 28.16-20**

One of the many things I cherish about our Episcopal tradition is the weekly reading of Scripture: an OT text; a psalm; a NT text; and a Gospel reading. We are, each week, surrounded by the biblical text...challenging us, comforting us, reminding us, joining us together with those who read these texts around the globe.

I must admit my weekly challenge with hearing the lectionary choices is to ask why and how these particular texts were selected to be read and heard and considered alongside one another. Sometimes, I will tell you, I spend a long time on Sunday mornings, thinking about this weekly scriptural puzzle, turning over seemingly disparate pieces of the biblical canon to see how they fit together. There are some weeks, I give up, deciding it is beyond my logic; other weeks, however, it is wonderfully surprising and obvious.

This week is one of those latter weeks.

I will confess: when I read the Gospel reading for today, I was not overly excited. But then, when I saw that the OT text is the first account of creation, I was overly excited.

Further, now that I have the opportunity for us to read these two texts side-by-side...well, that's almost too much excitement.

I can only suppose that many of us have read more than a few times the first account of creation, Genesis 1.1—2.4a. I was, in fact, tempted to read that text this morning, but I'm told I only have twelve minutes for a homily. So, let me ask you, nay urge you, to take a few minutes today or tomorrow to read that text, Genesis 1.1—2.4a...slowly, deliberately, like you're reading it for the first time.

This first account of creation opens with the familiar words of "beginning" and "God created" then closes with equally familiar words of "God blessed" and "the generations/events of the heavens and the earth when they were created."

And between that opening and closing, we are observing first-hand the creating, the unfolding, the begetting of the heavens and the earth...all commanded at the voice of God.

It is rhythmic; it is predictable; it repetitive: *God said; it was so; there was evening and morning; it was good.* We watch as this God sets in place the frame then fills it with life: plants; water creatures; land animals; humans. God establishes the order and cadence of life: with seasons; moon and sun.

Many of us have studied and read biblical texts together enough times that it will not surprise you that I also want us to give attention to the context, the situation, the seed bed of this narrative.

That context was one of utter chaos and confusion; it was the time of ancient Israel's exile in Babylonia in the sixth century BCE. Exile was a time outside of ordinary time, liminal time of in-between;

it was a time of uncertainty, a loss of all that was known and cherished;

it was period when our ancestors were sheltered in place and locked down as prisoners on the banks of the rivers in Babylon...where they sat and wept, refusing to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land (Psalm 137).

Yet, out of the midst of this exilic desperation, the poem we now call the first account of creation, our text in Genesis 1-2, echoes through the silent suffering and reminds us of God's power and authority over heaven and earth, over chaos and uncertainty, over darkness and light, over the creation of life and the dignity of life...crowning all of creation with the creation of the male/female human one, concluding with a self-congratulatory "it is very good."

I told myself not to get too caught up in talking about Genesis 1-2; we can do that together another time. For now, let us return to our Gospel text, and we ask, "what does the beginning of our biblical canon in Genesis have to do with the ending of Matthew's Gospel?" I am glad you asked.

But first, I will remind you as I've done several times in Wednesday Bible Study: let us read Matthew's Gospel on its own, not blending it with other Gospel accounts. The four gospels tell the same story but in four different versions, each one with its own style and purpose and audience, and even with different events.

So, this morning, we need to backtrack from the storyline we've been following the past few weeks: we have read dramatic post-resurrection texts in other gospels, the ascension of Jesus in another gospel, and the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts.

Now, we're back to the days immediately following the resurrection of Jesus as told by Matthew...without including much drama or details. The appearance of the resurrected Jesus is told quite matter-of-factly to women. And only a few verses later, in our reading for today, Matthew's Gospel reintroduces the group of male disciples.

"The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them." This is the first time the disciples have appeared in the gospel narrative since they ran away during the arrest of Jesus. Narratively, we suppose that they were in Jerusalem and left for

Galilee after the women reported having seen Jesus. These disciples acted on the testimony of the women.

The author of this gospel reported quite nonchalantly that these disciples “saw [Jesus].” Some “worshipped him, but some doubted.”

And then come these particular words in full force: Jesus said to them, *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*...cosmic power, all-powerful authority, complete authority over all the created order, all the living creatures in the skies, in the water, and on the earth. God has granted Jesus that power and authority at work in creation. Jesus is the proclaimed ruler of creation in God’s stead, the ruler in the present and coming Kingdom of God. A new creation is at work, that of God’s Kingdom.

But the focus in these verses is not only on this power and authority of Jesus. No, remember the very next words: therefore, go...don’t stay here but go, make other disciples, baptize them, and teach. The disciples in Matthew’s Gospel have had their role; now, the narrative shifts from them to others, others that will come from all nations on the earth, others which include us, you and me. We, in those words at the close of Matthew’s Gospel, are the narrative replacements for the original disciples; we are the one who have become disciples, baptized, and taught.

That means, we, as the disciples of Jesus, must continue that same commandment: Jesus says to us, *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, so go, pick yourself up, get yourself to work, and make more disciples, help them understand this new way of thinking, this Kingdom way, and teach what you have been taught.*

“Teaching” is a major theme or literary thread in Matthew’s Gospel. In it, Jesus is the rabbi *par excellence*, teaching and reframing and reforming the traditions of Torah.

What is it that Jesus has commanded and taught us, by reading the Gospel of Matthew?

- Teach that the poor in spirit, the gentle, the peacemakers, those who thirst for righteousness, these are the blessed ones.
- Teach that we are to love our enemies.
- Teach that we are the salt and light of the world.
- Teach that empty religiosity and playing church and showing off is hypocrisy.
- Teach that true greatness comes with child-like humility.
- Teach that the Kingdom of God restores the dignity and equality of every person.

The first humans were told to go and multiply and fill the earth.

The first disciples were told to go and make disciples and teach all nations of the earth.  
This Trinity Sunday we have been told to go and disciple and teach all nations of the earth.

Jesus said "all authority is mine," so go and teach...

- when life is chaotic and dark and liminal and uncertain, *all authority is mine so go and teach;*
- when the beauty of creation is threatened and polluted, *all authority is mine, so go and teach;*
- when human life is raped and robbed of its inherent dignity and breath itself is taken away, *all authority is mine so go and teach;*
- when confronted and sickened by an abuse of power and violence, *all authority is mine so go and teach.*

We are to disciple and teach with every ounce of our being...when we don't know what else to do, talk about what Jesus talked about: compassion; dignity of every person; respect; patience; equality...go and teach. Teach or preach...call it what you want. It is a way of being, of living in this world...even in the midst of chaos and confusion...that reflects what Rabbi Jesus has taught us.

Remember that I reminded us not to conflate other Gospel accounts into Matthew's Gospel: don't mix up the gospels into one.

Here's something special about Matthew's Gospel: there is no ascension. The gospel ends right here, but closes with very poignant words:

*remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

As regular as the coming of evening and morning,  
as predictable as the turning of the seasons of the year,  
as repetitive as the patterns of the sun and the moon and the stars,  
as certain is the dignity of all life (plants, animals, human),  
God is with us always.

So let it be. Amen