

Lectionary Guide for Genesis 1:1-2, 4a and Matthew 28:16-20

Priests probably wrote the well-known opening lines of the first book of the Bible, appropriately named, *Genesis*. It describes a time at the beginning when G_d created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep. It says that a wind (Hebrew, *ruach*, spirit) from God swept over the face of the water. God created light. And God saw that the light was good.

Five Questions

1. Commentators often see in Genesis two stories of creation. This one about creation in seven days was probably composed by priests, and the other one about Adam and Eve beginning with Genesis 2:4b by writers, who were concerned about the first earthlings and the introduction of good and evil. Have we noticed these differences in Genesis? What were the priests interested in? Which story appeals to you more...and why?
2. It is clear in Genesis 1 that God created the heavens, earth, light then presented these to “humankind.” The unfolding of the universe culminated in the creation of human beings. What does this say about what was important to the priests?
3. Some ecologically-concerned people criticize Genesis 1:28-30 because it sounds as though the priests understood God to want humans to “subdue, have dominion over, and use” nature. They prefer humans to steward, partner with and share the gifts of nature. What do we think about this seeming tension? And how do we deal with it? At the same time, “dominion” comes from the same word for God (Latin, *dominus* or lord). What kind of Lordship do we experience from God? What kind of lordship would God want us to have with nature?
4. The reading says that “*a wind swept over the face of the waters.*” (1:2b) How important is moving wind (spirit) to life? What does it stand for when we feel it on our faces, watch bushes and trees sway in it, observe insects and birds contend with it, and track it when it is especially strong? Recall an experience of wind.
5. The lection says that the earth was formless, darkness covered the waters, but God created light, which was good. Describe a time in nature when you might have found yourself without light. How important is (enough and not too much) light to you, and is it truly “good?”

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Matthew 28:16-20

This week, we read the Ascension story in the First Gospel, which we studied in the Third Gospel two weeks ago. Here Jesus directed eleven disciples to a mountain near Galilee. Some “worshipped” him, others “doubted.” Trying to convince all, Jesus said, *all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him*. Then he directed them *“to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”* ...and teaching them to obey. He ended by saying, *“I am with you always to the end of the age.”* (v. 20)

Five Questions

1. If you remember, try to name some of the similarities and differences between Luke’s Ascension and Matthew’s. In Matthew, the site of the Ascension was near Galilee, and it is made clear that some of the disciples believed (worshipped) him while others did not. What does this say about the state of the disciples after Jesus died and “ascended” to heaven?
2. Jesus calls down all the authority of heaven and earth to convince the small group of his power from God and some disciples. What is your reaction when you read verse 19? Do you feel that Jesus empowered himself as he departed?
3. Turning from himself to his disciples, Jesus directed them *to make disciples of all nations*. What do we think he was saying here? Some interpret this as the nations of Judea and Israel. Since then others have interpreted this as nations around the world so, evangelize, teach and serve God around the globe. What are our thoughts?
4. In that same sentence, Jesus directed his disciples to baptize *in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit* (28:19b). Repeated by Matthew, these words tell us that they were already being used among the disciples at Baptisms and other services. Where have we heard this Trinitarian formula used more recently? Some say Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.
5. The Trinity became the formula to describe our understanding of God in three persons. More than anything, it says that God is multivalent, pointing to that is which is ultimate in our lives. It says that God is multi-faceted while still being unified. It says that God is one but interrelated as Creator, Christ and Comforter. Is the Trinity significant to our understanding of what it means to be a Christian? If so, how does it affect our practice of faith?

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