

## BY WHOSE AUTHORITY?

6/7/20 ~ St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Encinitas, CA (*Livestreamed*)

Trinity Sunday (A): Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

"By whose authority do you do these things?" During his earthly ministry, Jesus is asked this question repeatedly by various religious and political leaders. It's a question we ask our leaders, each other, and, in so many words, I guess, when your kids say, "you're not the boss of me," they, too, are asking: "By whose authority do you do this?"

While a good number of us were taught to never, ever question authority. Others were encouraged by a parent to always question authority. Many of us have learned to question authority because those in power used their authority for what could basically be described as self-gain.

So, when I consider the racial turmoil we are currently facing as a nation, what's fascinating to me is the way in which Jesus talks about his authority. In today's Gospel, Jesus lays the groundwork to aid the disciples' understanding by answering the question straight out: his authority comes from God.

And this authority extends across all of heaven and earth. Jesus establishes his authority as the foundation of the work for which he is commissioning his followers. And that work is to make disciples of ALL nations. As Jesus prepares his trusted students to become the teachers, he uses his God-given authority to call them into action.

As he passes along the authority to do this work, Jesus does so with absolutely no hint of coercion or force. It seems that would go without saying, but I think it's important we pull that out and point to it as one of our Christian Truths. We bring people to Christ through love not coercion.

During this current season of racial tension, I believe, now more than ever, we are finally realizing the work of dismantling racism in our country is nowhere near complete. And that might make any one of us feel absolutely hopeless. But letting ourselves wallow in a state of hopelessness is antithetical to what our great teacher Jesus modeled.

A few months ago, I watched the movie "Just Mercy," which is based on the true story of how a young Black attorney helped get an innocent Black man off of death row and out of prison. In the courtroom, the attorney says:

Mr. McMillian made me realize we can't change the world with only ideas in our minds. We need conviction in our hearts. This man taught me how to stay hopeful, because I now know that hopelessness is the enemy of justice. Hope allows us to push forward, even when the truth is distorted by the people in power.

That really hit home for me. Hopelessness is the enemy of justice. And there are so many ways that you and I avoid getting involved. We say we don't know how; we say we're too burdened with our own problems; we say it's too much to overcome.

The responsibility that comes with our God-given authority is touched on in our reading from Genesis. In this version of the creation story, we are told that God gave humanity dominion over all the earth and all the creatures that inhabit it. That is a huge amount of responsibility, because dominion doesn't mean "dominate," it means to

care for; we are charged with caring for our fellow brothers and sisters in the same way God cares for us.

As the beauty of creation is described in Genesis, the preciousness of life becomes so clear, with God declaring: “it is good.” And so, from that perspective, it’s easy to say that “all lives matter.” But as I mentioned in my video the other day, we must be a part of the voice that says “no lives are more important than other lives,” or to be specific, “white lives are not more important than other lives.” So, in this moment, when Black people are dying and being murdered just because of their skin color, we must stand up and declare with our words and our actions, Black lives matter.

Besides believing what that young attorney said in the film, that “Hope allows us to push forward, even when the truth is distorted by the people in power,” I also find a lot of hope in today’s story of creation, where something beautiful, that previously never existed, was created out of chaos.

In the midst of the injustice, in the midst of the peaceful protests, in the midst of the riots I believe something new is being created, and I for one want to use my authority to help give birth to the reparation so deeply needed in this country.

And, yes, we are tired, we weary, but the Creation story also shows that there is balance. The action of creation didn’t stop simply because there was a day of rest, creation continues always. We add to the momentum, we rest, and we add some more.

And, finally, we remember we do not do this alone. As Jesus said to his original disciples, he calls out to all of us: “I am with you always.” Our authority comes from God. We do these things through God’s authority.

-AMEN

### ***Genesis 1:1-2:4a***

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and 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." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,

## **Psalm 8**

- 1 O LORD our Governor, \*  
how exalted is your Name in all the world!
  
- 2 Out of the mouths of infants and children \*  
your majesty is praised above the heavens.

- 3 You have set up a stronghold against your adversaries, \*  
to quell the enemy and the avenger.
- 4 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, \*  
the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,
- 5 What is man that you should be mindful of him? \*  
the son of man that you should seek him out?
- 6 You have made him but little lower than the angels; \*  
you adorn him with glory and honor;
- 7 You give him mastery over the works of your hands; \*  
you put all things under his feet:
- 8 All sheep and oxen, \*  
even the wild beasts of the field,
- 9 The birds of the air, the fish of the sea, \*  
and whatsoever walks in the paths of the sea.
- 10 O LORD our Governor, \*  
how exalted is your Name in all the world!

**2 Corinthians 13:11-13**

<sup>11</sup>Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. <sup>12</sup>Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. <sup>13</sup>The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

**Matthew 28:16-20**

<sup>16</sup>Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."