

“God’s Reality Show”

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UCC at The Villages, FL
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Trinity Sunday

Genesis 1:1-13

Matthew 28:16-20

‘Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee,

to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted.’

Matthew 28:16-17

Let us pray... O God,

Help us to be grounded in your Holy Spirit of discernment,

helping us see what is real and what is false,

May we know the difference between what is hype and what is factual,

between what is spin and what we can trust in and hope for.

Amen

About fifteen years ago, a media phenomenon emerged on television called the ‘reality show’.

Apparently, the idea has been around for years with people being filmed responding to unscripted life situations – like Candid Camera.

There have been documentaries like public TV’s “Two American Families” – which chronicled two middle class families’ struggles over 20 years, but “reality shows” as we know them are a form of entertainment.

The first ‘reality show’ I recall that followed the lives of ‘real people’ was of a newlywed couple, Nick & Jessica – who have since divorced.

The show turned them into celebrities,

but there have been those who already were celebrities like aging rock stars, wrestlers, duck call entrepreneurs, even a rapper turned pastor,

who permitted the videotaping of their families’ lives

in all their privileged excess and ordinary silliness.

The ‘reality show’ concept has morphed into all kinds of other scenarios

which include survivors on a desert island, people testing their ‘fear factor’,

‘iron’chefs, apprentices, bachelors, bachelorettes, and ‘American idols’,

all in the pretext of being so-called ‘real’ life situations.

These programs often have a format of competition

where ordinary people are given a chance to be extraordinary –

or they are vilified and voted off the island or out of the kitchen.

So, the ‘reality’ of these shows is natural selection that they hope will

produce good TV ratings that favor the survival of the fittest –

which to some extent, mirrors the corporate world...

Willard, p.2

The audience experiences the contestants' trials vicariously
and sometimes even gets to participate in the voting –
tempted into the world of being winners or losers.

We can find ourselves admiring the participants' celebrity
or despising them with the self-righteousness of supermarket tabloids,
all as a form of entertainment like the gladiator contests
of Roman arenas of long ago.

So, the reality of the world is presented to us as a competition
that requires Darwin's 'dog eat dog' mentality to survive.

Is there an alternative?

Can Christianity help people cope in the midst of such a world 'reality'?

One of the most important lessons for any of us to learn
is the principle of 'cause and effect' –

God has set up our world to work by 'cause and effect'.

As Christians, we believe the world came into being from a 'first cause'
that both Genesis and the Gospel of John describe as

God speaking the world into being –

"In the beginning was the Word" and "God said 'Let there be light...'"

So, starting with the first chapter of Genesis,

we have the foundation of 'cause and effect' for the reality of life on Earth.

Before Creation, there had been nothing – or rather, no thing,

God pre-existed Creation as a spiritual being.

Then, in the first three days of the Creation story,

God sets the stage for God's 'reality show',

creating not only Heaven and Earth, but time and space as well.

On Day One,

there was light and the separation of night and day as time began.

On Day Two,

sky and sea were created as waters were separated by a 'firmament'.

By Day Three,

dry land emerged, and along with sea and sky,

they provide the spaces for life to exist on earth.

On Days Four, Five, and Six, the heavens are filled with Sun, Moon, and stars;

the sky with flying creatures, the seas with water creatures,

the land with creatures that run, climb, and crawl and

finally with human-kind which is able to live in all these environments.

In this way the stages were set – so to speak, for the great drama of life on Earth.

Willard, p.3

The lectionary readings today support the theme for Trinity Sunday, in which we reflect on the concept of God as a Trinity – simultaneously, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, or traditionally, Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

For me, it is easier to talk about the Trinity in terms of the three venues or arenas where God is present rather than explaining how God is somehow three distinct ‘persons’, yet having the ‘same essence’.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trinity>

The traditional notion of God as ‘Father’ provides a convenient connection to Fathers’ Day with the reading from Genesis about Creation.

Let me acknowledge that the quest for women’s rights has informed feminist theology in exposing the inequities of patriarchal culture.

We are challenged to be more sensitive to the words we use to describe God.

An unfortunate consequence of this effort is our reluctance to use ‘Father’ as a way of talking about God, too.

Not everyone’s experience of their earthly father has been good, but that can be said about one’s earthly mother as well.

The challenge for us as believers is always to see God as the perfect example of what a father – and a mother, *should* be.

God – being God Almighty, must not be limited in our minds to either metaphor; So with that caution in mind, I believe it is acceptable if you want to think of God the Creator as ‘Father’ – or ‘Mother’.

Thinking of God the Creator in the role of ‘Father’, brings to my mind, thoughts of my dad’s workshop at our home – which was the garage, and it was filled with all kinds of tools, jars of parts, nuts and bolts, ladder, table saw, lawn mower, sheets of plywood, 2x4’s – and most anything that an electrician, plumber, or carpenter would need on hand.

My dad still has the knack for creating and fixing things – most recently my parents had a problem with their water heater which he had to fix before heading back north for the summer.

I have always known my father to approach any project with confidence in the principle of ‘cause and effect’ – and if he didn’t know how, he would observe someone to learn how to undo the ill effects of the cause of a problem or build something based on his knowledge of what the right tools can do.

Willard, p.4

God the Creator is present in the most microscopic realities of subatomic particles to radio-telescopic realities of the farthest flung stars;

God the Creator has given us the potentials for thermonuclear dynamics, Persian carpet weaving, automotive mechanics, and the way to make chocolate fudge perfect every time.

God the Spirit was present before the world began, hovering over the watery chaos to bring order to Creation, and is that aspect of God that has access to human consciousness and the watery chaos of our sub-conscious;

The Spirit is the 'still, small voice' that spoke to the Prophet Elijah despite the storms of earthquake, wind, and fire.

Hinduism speaks of the outward and inward realities of God, but Christianity includes a third reality and that is in the midst of the commerce and community of being a human.

It is in the practical reality of life on Earth, that Jesus of Nazareth brought together the outward and inward realities of God as the Son of God who was also the Son of Man – the HUMAN image of God.

We encounter God through the healing mercy of Christ who is attributed with calming the natural storms of tempests at sea and the emotional and spiritual storms of human nature.

Too bad there weren't camera crews back then, following Jesus around, because being in his presence was partly how he taught his disciples – by cause and effect.

That would have been a reality show really worth tuning in to which would have been both entertaining and enlightening.

The only people who really dropped out of Christ's program were those who voted themselves off because of their self-righteousness – basically the judges themselves.

Jesus in the Gospels is otherwise patient and accepting of everybody – even Pharisees and Romans, as well as prostitutes, tax-collectors, and those who abandoned him in his hour of need.

He welcomed those who sought him out, no matter who they were or where they were on their life's journey.

It is through Christ Jesus, that we can make sense of the character of God our Father/Mother who is present both in the natural world and our inner spiritual life, to help us avoid the nonsense of voting each other off this island home we call Earth.

Amen

*Our lesson today comes from Genesis 1:1-13
and describes the first three days of Creation
in which the foundation for the world was established,
so that the reality of life could take place...*

[1] In the beginning

God created the heavens and the earth.

[2] The earth was without form and void,

and darkness was upon the face of the deep;

and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

[3] And God said,

"Let there be light"; and there was light.

[4] And God saw that the light was good;

and God separated the light from the darkness.

[5] God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.

And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

[6] And God said,

"Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters,

and let it separate the waters from the waters."

[7] And God made the firmament

and separated the waters which were under the firmament

from the waters which were above the firmament.

And it was so.

[8] And God called the firmament Heaven.

And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

[9] And God said,

"Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together

into one place, and let the dry land appear."

And it was so.

[10] God called the dry land Earth,

and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas.

And God saw that it was good.

[11] And God said,

"Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed,

and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed,

each according to its kind, upon the earth."

And it was so.

[12] The earth brought forth vegetation,

plants yielding seed according to their own kinds,

and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed,

each according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good.

[13] And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

Let us be guided and challenged by these words.

Matthew 28:16-20

[16] Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee,
to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

[17] And when they saw him they worshiped him;
but some doubted.

[18] And Jesus came and said to them,
"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

[19] 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,

[20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you;
and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

Genesis 1:1-2:2

[Slide 1] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

[Slide 2] The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the watery chaos.

[Slide 3] And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good;

[Slide 4] 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, one day.

[Slide 5] And God said, "Let there be a firmament to separate the waters above from the waters below." And God made the firmament and separated the waters under the firmament from the waters above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

[Slide 6] And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together to let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters were called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

[Slide 7] And God said, "Let the earth put forth plants and trees." And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

[Slide 8] And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be signs for days, months, and years, and give light upon the earth." And it was so. And God made the bigger light to rule the day, and the smaller light to rule the night along with the stars. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

[Slide 9] And God said, "Let the waters bring forth living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens." So God created every living creature that swims in the waters and every winged bird that flies in the sky. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed all the creatures. And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

[Slide 10] And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: herds of cattle and sheep, creeping things, and all kinds of beasts. And God saw that it was good.

[Slide 11] Then God said, "Let's make people in our image, and let them have power over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the animals of the earth." So God created people in God's own image, male & female.

[Slide 12] And God saw everything that was made was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

[Slide 13] In this way, the creation of the heavens and the earth were accomplished, and all the worlds within worlds within them. And on the seventh day God finished, and rested to reflect upon all that was created. Amen!