

“God’s Love is Making All Things New”

Sermon by Vicar Kevin Tracey

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Sabbath Series 2

Gen. 2:1-3; John 15:9-15

Grace to you and peace from God our creator and our Lord Jesus the Christ. Amen.

This morning, we hear from Genesis and the beginning of creation— or more accurately, the grand finale of creation—the finale that is both wildly complex and shockingly simple.

Our Genesis account is unique in a lot of ways. And if you’ll allow me to indulge my undergraduate background in anthropology and religious studies... its particularly unique among the social and religious landscape of the ancient near east, the region where the Hebrew Bible has its origins. See, in contrast to the other narratives of the time, the accounts of creation that we inherit in our Scriptural tradition, begin not with violence or chaos, but with God speaking—with God exercising God’s power in crafting creation and forming humanity with a word.

And then, to even further complicate things, God takes the radical step of resting. This offers a clear reminder that God is in control. God does not need to be constantly working or involved in all the minute workings of the world. God is powerful enough to rest.

And even more than simply resting, God makes this rest holy; God blesses it. It is this blessing of rest that we will consider this morning as we continue in our sermon series on the Sabbath. In this holy and sacred rest that God exemplifies and blesses, and that last week we were commanded to observe and keep holy, we encounter a firm reminder that we are not God. And a reminder that we are all connected in our mutual belonging to God.

In our shared breath—in the shared community that God calls us into, we can begin to see the power of the Sabbath start to take hold. The separations and divisions that society tries desperately to establish fall away in this community of God. The Sabbath offers each of us a chance to breath, to interrupt the cycle of business and work, and to recognize that we need each other—that we cannot, and must not, do this alone.

Thankfully, we aren’t left alone and wondering where to go next... Jesus presents a direction. That’s where we land in John’s Gospel today. With Jesus’s words to the disciples in the midst of chaos and his approaching betrayal and arrest. We find Jesus offering words of love. This Gospel passage comes just a few chapters before Jesus is arrested and sentenced to death. And yet, in this great dialogue that Jesus engages in with his disciples leading up to the Passover celebration and the subsequent betrayal that we know will follow, Jesus offers this commandment to love. To love unconditionally and to love as Jesus has loved each of them.

There is another key word at play here: abide. Jesus’s command is not to just love each other, something certainly hard enough. He commands them to abide in love. I actually looked up the definition of “abide” in English and discovered that are several options. So, I went back to the Greek and looked that up, because Seminarians love to look at the Greek.

Jesus here uses “μένω,” which can translate to abide. But it encapsulates more than English will let us hear—it invokes of ideas of staying and remaining—of living in something and being truly united with it.

This is a part of the message that Jesus brings, and it sits at the center of his ministry.

And like all of Jesus's messages, it does not stay static or stuck in first century Palestine. His words call out to us too. We too are commanded to abide in Love; to remain in love, to live in love and be united through it and by it.

Today, folks across the ELCA and in other denominations and communities are commemorating Landing Day, the day that 400 years ago, signaled the arrival of the first recorded ship of enslaved Africans to North America. This was just the first of what would be a long and tragic history of slavery, segregation, and racism in America. And I encourage you to look at a recent project put out by the New York Times entitled, "The 1619 Project," which looks at the very real ways the effects of the slave trade are still felt today in all part of our American Society.

This is just one example of the brokenness that interrupts our community. An example of what it looks like to not abide in love and to instead focus on the self—to focus not on God but our own human power. And this list go on:

We could talk about the newest movement of conversion "therapy" that attempts to teach young queer people that they can "pray away the gay;"

Or we could talk about the housing crisis here in DC and the ways that people experiencing homelessness are treated as outcasts;

Or we could talk about the crisis at our southern boarder where children are being held in cages and denied vaccines and other resources;

The list could go on and on.

This is, fundamentally, not the way that God envisioned the world to be. This dehumanization, this othering, this lack of relationship, this rejection of certain people's humanity, is counter to the vision that God has for the world. These are things that interrupt our community—that interrupt the love that Jesus calls us to abide in.

But this is not the end of the story—We remember God's cycle-interrupting, world-creating, death-defying power in these moments. The God who created with word and breath and the Savior who told stories about love to the man he knew would betray him days later.

And we remember that Jesus's death and resurrection means that the brokenness of this world does not have the last say. It means that sin, sin like racism and the slave trade and conversion therapy and separated families, does not have the final say. It means that God's love overflows and abounds, and God will destroy death and sin and that will be final say.

After creating, God rests. After exercising God's power, God shows power in a different way—in rest. And teaches us to do the same. To live in love and community; to recognize that power of community and the strength that is found in the body of Christ. And in doing so, God offers us assurance for the future. A reminder that the brokenness and sin of this world is, in some very hard to understand way, temporary—and that God is in the business of making all things new.

So, we too take comfort in this blessed rest, in knowing that we can rest, because we are linked to each other and abiding in Christ.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.