

First Presbyterian Church  
Greenfield, Indiana  
Pastor John J. Paulson

June 19, 2011

Trinity Sunday

**Taking A Look At Our World!**

Genesis 1:1–2:4

It is very good!

Psalms 8

God's work is wonderful!

2 Corinthians 13:11–13

Aim for perfection!

Matthew 28:16–20

Go, Teach, Preach, Baptize!

*Informally before the sermon: Imagine you are on the International Space Station with the astronauts and looking out at our world. You would see an almost round object shaded in blues and greens with wisps of white clouds. You can't tell much about our world, can you? Can you tell if there are any people on it? Can you see any cars or trains or airplanes? Can you see any wars? Any parks? Any cruise ships? Probably not. Can you tell if this is a good place or a not-so-good place?*

*Now imagine that you are God who created it all!*

**Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O LORD, our Rock and our Redeemer! Amen**

The Bible story in Genesis tells us that God was very satisfied after creating the world. Just before God rested on the seventh day, God looked over what had been created and pronounced it "very good." God was pleased with the light and the day and the night. God was pleased with the sky and the ground. God liked the seas and the land and the vegetation and the trees and fruit they produced. God was satisfied with the sun and the moon; he enjoyed the creatures in the sea and the birds in the air, and when God had finished with creating the animals and human beings, God looked it all over and said it is "very good!" It was so good that God decided to rest, and on the seventh day, he did just that.

That's a shorthand summary of what Mark read to us a few minutes ago. Some people call it poetry, others try to claim it is 100% true and happened exactly that way. No one can be certain. There are a lot of details left out. We don't know how long ago it happened? We don't know many of the details; all we really know is that it happened. From out of nothing, God, the supreme being in the universe, created an entire world full of animals, people, sea creatures, birds, and water and vegetation.

And, since God created it, and was satisfied with it, we know that God was very pleased and pronounced it very good.

The Bible begins with this story as it begins to develop the story of our God. As we continue through the Bible book after book and story after story, the picture of God continues to develop. It develops like a Polaroid picture used to develop. First it is gray, then it gets fuzzy, then it finally gets clear and we can see the whole picture.

Like looking at that Polaroid when it first comes from the camera, our story from Genesis gives us a picture of God only beginning to develop; we are seeing only the beginning of our world; the beginning of our human family; the beginning of God's family.

Like the family stories that are passed around at family reunions about great grandma and how she picked the size for the pan that we still always cook the ham in, and the stories about great-great grandpa and how he got bought land and settled in Indiana or Kentucky, this creation story was passed down orally from generation to generation before it was first set down on paper. As such, it has become much more than just an account of God's actions during creation. It is a family story about our God that gives us a glimpse of our beginnings and sets the stage for future generations. As we learn a lot about great-great grandpa in stories about his life, we learn a lot about God in this story about God's life.

We see that God is careful in planning and carrying out his plan. We watch as God takes time to make sure that each step will interface with the next step in creation. We learn that God judges each step as it is completed. We learn that God cares about his creation. These are all characteristics that we see much more clearly as the Bible unfolds the story of God and us; the story about how God cares for us and what God expects of us in return. It is the beginning of the story of God's Grace that envelopes us daily in our lives. It is the beginning of the story of God's Grace that continues in our lives today.

Over the next few weeks we will follow the development of God's family and see what lessons we can learn from the exploits of our ancient ancestors and their interactions with God.

Back to today and world that God created.

What if God took a survey today? What if God was to ask us if the world is still very good, what would we say? Would we, with a straight face, be able to tell God that it is still

very good? Or would we try to make some excuses for our world, the world that God left us in charge of? How would we answer God's questions?

Fortunately, it is not going to happen. God is not going to take a survey and ask us how the world is doing; God is not going to text you to find out how the Christian community in America is getting along, and God isn't going to ask you how you were following Jesus' final instructions.

Why? Not because God couldn't take a survey; God certainly could. Not because God couldn't text you; I'm pretty certain that God could, if God wanted to. Not because God won't take the time to ask you how you are doing. Not because of any of these reasons. No, God won't be asking you or me because God knows.

If our God had finished creation and stopped and rested forever, God might have to depend on us to tell him what is going on. However, God didn't just create a throw-away world and go away. As we find in the rest of the Bible, God may have rested for a time, but God got busy again and stayed involved in his creation; and God and continues to watch over creation to see how it is doing. God knows.

When things weren't going the way God wanted them to go, God sought out Abraham and Isaac and Rebekah and Jacob; God worked with Moses and David and the Prophets. God sent Jesus to try to change things God didn't like. Then, after Jesus, God sent the Holy Spirit to continue to be with us, and I suspect, keep reporting back on how we are doing.

I know that God loves it when we get it right. God loves it when we improve our world; when we plant trees and clean up river beds; when we share the resources that God placed in the earth; when we help our neighbors; when we pray and worship and praise; when we recognize the importance of Jesus in our lives.

In Psalm 8, the psalmist looks at the world of his day and proclaims that God is majestic; proclaims that the world is wonderful; praises God and wonders why God is even concerned about an insignificant human being in the midst of the entire creation.

Listen to these words of praise:

*O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in*

*place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*<sup>1</sup>

It has been over twenty five years since we moved here in 1985 from New Jersey, and I am still amazed as I watch the annual farming cycle. You would think I was a little kid when I see a big tractor or one of those fertilizing vehicles with arms and very tall tires that remind me of an airplane. I keep a camera in the car, and if you were driving with me, you would often see me take it from its case on the dashboard and snap a picture or two of a big green John Deere machine or of an old rusty red Farmall tractor. I am actually in awe of the equipment and the men and women who plow and plant and weed and harvest in God's amazing creation.

I can fully agree with the psalmist that this creation, this world is so amazing and wonderful; then I think that God gave it to us. God gave us dominion over everything as the psalmist says: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

And, when I take a look at our world and try to think about it as I suspect God must think about it, I can't honestly say that I would not pronounce it "very good" as God once pronounced the world to be.

There are wars and rebellions in Iraq and Afghanistan and Lybia; there is poverty, even right here in affluent Greenfield. There are people starving to death or at least going to bed hungry every night in Africa, South America, Mexico and other parts of the world as well. And what are we doing about it?

Do you think that God expects us to help make the world "very good" again? I do, and I imagine you do too.

So, what are we doing? What can we do? We can't change the whole world all by ourselves, but we can help bring change little by little by helping in our own community and, through prayer, helping in the whole world.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalms 8: 1 – 9 (NIV)

We are a small church with a big heart. As Mark mentioned last week, our contributions to the local community of funds raised by the Strawberry Fest, Riley Days and our Chili days are impressive. And, they are only part of what we do in our community and our world. We have the food pantry box out by the front door and the new paper goods collection box in the Selman room. It may not seem like much, but a package of paper towels or toilet paper a week dropped in the Selman room box can make a big difference in someone's life. A couple of boxes of corn flakes or a can of chili dropped in the food pantry box can brighten up the day for a ten year old who is hungry this summer since breakfast and lunch are not available in school during the summer.

And we can share God's story. We can share our love for God with others through our witness and evangelism, and through the way we live our lives.

And, of course we can pray. A prayer for someone mentioned in the PCUSA Mission Year Book living in Ghana or Congo can help. A prayer for someone we hear about on the evening news can make a difference.

We can't change the world all at once, but we can help change it one person or one family at a time.

If God did send that survey and ask how the world is today, and we truthfully answer that it is not so good, at least we can be in a good position to answer God's follow-up question, "well, what are you doing about it?"

AMEN