

**The First Church of Christ in Hartford (Center Church)  
Sunday, May 18, 2008 Trinity Sunday**

**Sermon:**

**“Let Us Go and Make”**

**Jason Charneski, Director of Music and the Arts**

**Texts:**

**Genesis 1: 26-31a**

**Matthew 28: 16-20**

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

It's not that often that a church's musician is invited to preach – maybe that's a good thing. I'm honored to have been asked, and I thank Pastor Goodman for the invitation and for the encouragement to do so. It is a humbling task, because there is so much in this morning's readings from scripture that we could explore; yet, I will endeavor to focus our thoughts on what we are called to do as creatures made in the image of God and as followers of Jesus, the one we call the Christ.

One of the interesting aspects of the Book of Genesis is that it contains TWO accounts of the Creation. In the first, located in chapter 1, mankind is the last thing to be created, and, as we heard in verse 31, “God saw everything that he had made and, indeed, it was very good.” As the editors of the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* state, this means that the Creation perfectly corresponded to God's intention.

The second account of the Creation begins in the second half of verse 4 of chapter 2. In this account, mankind is the first thing to be created. We then get the story of the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve, the temptation by the serpent that led to Sin and, therefore, the corruption of that which was perfect (remember, in Creation account no. 1, everything perfectly corresponded to God's intention: “God saw everything that he had made and, indeed, it was very good.”).

Like I did, you may not have known about or considered the significance of two differing accounts of the Creation. Scholarship tells us that ancient texts were compiled into and adapted from other sources to create Genesis. We know also that much contained in these accounts, and in stories like the Great Flood, existed in other ancient texts from areas other than Mesopotamia.

So, our “story” as God's people – the whole of humanity – begins in Genesis 1 with some instructions from God about what mankind is to do; that is, living in and tending to the creation and its needs. The creation account in Chapter 1 does not give any indication of a relationship between God and mankind. We get that in Chapter 2.

There is no mention in either Creation account that mankind is called to worship God. The first indication of any “worship,” which is a form of relationship, occurs in the story of Cain and Abel, as they made offerings of fruit and livestock. Now, here is where it starts to get interesting: we are told in Genesis, chapter 4, that “God had no regard” for Cain's offering, but “had regard” for Abel's.

The words of the passage do not tell us why God seemingly was more pleased with Abel's offering. But, Cain gets angry and murders Abel. The motive: jealousy, perhaps, because God seemingly showed favor to Cain's younger brother. Then there's the relatively rude, disowning exchange between God and Cain: God, playing coy, asks Cain where Abel is, and Cain responds, “I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?” I'll return to that question in a few minutes.

But, first, I think there is something else to be explored in the story of Cain and Abel...and God. It has more to do with how we respond to what God has called us to do with what we have: we are called to give our best to God and to the world. The phrase, “to whom much is given, much is required” rings true. Apparently, the fruit that Cain

offered was not the best that he possessed; one might therefore surmise that he was keeping the best for himself. Dare I suggest that Cain was “hoarding?” Abel’s offering, apparently, was the best he had. I think that is why God was pleased with Abel’s offering and not with Cain’s.

Cain is a selfish character, isn’t he? Therefore, we know that God’s answer to Cain’s question, “Am I my brother’s keeper,” is “Yes.” The evidence to support this conclusion comes from Jesus’ reiterating the great commandment, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and mind,” and then giving the new commandment, “and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

This takes us to this morning’s Gospel lesson: the end of Matthew, at the point when Jesus’ disciples are with him in Galilee, soon after the resurrection. Matthew, writing late in the first century at the earliest, more likely well into the second century – many years after Paul’s missionary journeys and his letters – has Jesus state, “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, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Just as God gives directions to mankind in Genesis 1, I think Jesus gives us similar directions at the end of Matthew. Jesus’ “creation” is bringing people into relationship with God and with each other. It makes sense; given the statement by Matthew that Jesus would be called Emmanuel, meaning “God with us.”

The “Great Commission,” as these closing words in Matthew have come to be known, is a call to us to be in relationship with and give ourselves to the whole world. It is a positive form of the story of Cain and Abel: we are not to keep our faith and our possessions to ourselves – we are not to “hoard.” We are called to share our faith, to give it to others; in short, to MAKE disciples. In so doing, we offer our best to God.

Though Jesus is not physically with us, the Holy Spirit can be, if we allow it. Allowing the Holy Spirit to be with us, I think, means taking seriously to heart and mind and – essentially – “living” Jesus’ final words in Matthew: “And remember, I am with you always [that’s Emmanuel] to the end of the age.” How often we forget this and, as a result, miss the many ways that God speaks to us and acts in our lives. That “...taking seriously to heart and mind...” of which I speak is a different way of saying that we need to “practice” discernment.

This practice of discernment is something that we need to do every day. Think of professional athletes or – more personally – professional musicians. They practice every day. What you see as the end result – a game or race, or a concert – comes from synthesizing many different motor skills and psychological preparation. The best are the best because they are intentional about it; they do not take their skills for granted – they constantly refine and improve and they do not fear the challenge of working to master something new. Just ask the choir about my rehearsal process.

With this in mind, let us now think about what God calls us to do through the Creation and what Jesus calls us to do through The Great Commission. The more we “practice,” the more we will come to understand and be able to tend to the world: its peoples and its places – the entire Creation.

How do we “do” this great call? There are many ways and, for each of us, the “how,” “what,” and “when” will be different, wonderfully diverse, and come to be known through practice. But, to give us a few reminders, here are some general ways: we are to give witness to God’s work in and through us by telling others of our experiences of God or the Holy Spirit and of our lives of faith; we are to explore and learn from the stories and writings contained in scripture and in other sources and subsequent testimonies; we are to build relationships with one another; we are to be in communion with God and each other through worship, prayer, and fellowship; and we are called to help heal the afflicted, free the oppressed, and bind the broken-hearted. Yes, we are our brother’s keepers.

It requires of us an attitude – a PRACTICE – of selflessness and giving, rather than the attitude of selfishness and hoarding that we see in Cain and, sadly, that we see so prevalent in our world now. Let us not sit and take; but, rather, let us go and make! Amen.

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