

“Dunkin’ Doubters”  
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 Presbyterian Church in Leonia  
 June 4, 2023

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Genesis 1:1-2:4a  
 Matthew 28:16-20

*“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.”* Jesus gives this charge to the disciples, which is why we have elevated this ritual to the level of sacrament.

When those 11 disciples gathered around Jesus before Jesus ascended, on the mountain where Jesus directed them, according to Matthew, “some of them doubted.” And yet these are the very people whom Jesus called to go out and baptize all nations. I stop to think how remarkable it is that this great inheritance of faith into which we take part was built by people who weren’t 100% sure of what they were doing. You may find that troubling: *Are they just making it all up?* I actually had this suspicion as a child– that maybe the adults were making it all up, so that kids would behave. But I liked the doughnuts and cookies I could always find after worship, so I stuck around, long enough to find that there is something true about this journey in faith that continues to make it worth being on. Now, I actually find it to be a great entry point into the Christian faith that its earliest leaders held doubts. It shows that the grace that this faith offers isn’t up to us and the strength of our faith. It’s up to what the Spirit can do if we give her just the smallest chance to work with and through us.

Our sacrament of baptism draws deeply from that first creation story in Genesis, starting with the wind of God that swept over the waters. You see, according to the bible, even when the earth was a formless void, water was there. And that wind of God? In Hebrew, the word for wind also means Spirit; the Spirit was there, with God, creating life out of a void.

There is a mystery embedded in the text of the first creation story in Genesis. That’s right– I said, *first* creation story. There are two creation stories; in the first one, creation comes with order and precision over 6 days, with a seventh day of rest, and another that happens in the course of a day, starting with God breathing into dust and making *ha’adam*, the first human, and from there planting a garden and growing every sort of tree.

You can hear the different versions of the creation story more clearly if you look at the original Hebrew; for instance, the second version, where God forms from the dust of the earth and gives breath with a sacred kiss, uses the name Adonai for God. In Hebrew, that means “The Lord” and is actually a substitution, because the actual name for God– Yahweh– was considered by the ancient Hebrews to be too sacred to even say or write. But the first version of creation in Genesis uses the name “Elohim” for God– which, strangely, is a plural form, meaning gods. It seems that God isn’t acting alone; when Elohim comes up with the idea to make humans, Elohim says, Let *us* make humankind in our image, according to *our* likeness.

People act like pronouns are a big deal now, and we are more careful to ask people their preferred pronouns to honor the gender diversity in our families and communities. But God has been shifting pronouns since the beginning of creation, according to Genesis. Today is Trinity Sunday, and some say that here God is speaking in unison with the three persons of the Trinity: Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit, three in one, making it all happen. Others say this use of the plural pronoun is like the Royal We, as if when the Queen Elizabeth said, “We are the Queen of England” -recognizing that her power comes from more than herself alone; it comes from the people, and it comes from God.

I like the idea that in creating humans, God was putting flesh on a plurality that God held within Godself. “In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them.” I understand this to mean that each one of us holds both male and female energy inside, because within God, there is both male and female energy. But more importantly, there is something within the heart of God that needs community.

“Full humanity, we might say, is never in the singular, never merely “I” or “me”; it’s always in the plural, always “us” and “we.” (Salt Lectionary)

I am reminded of the Korean I am very slowly trying to learn. If I want to say “My house” in Korean, I would say “우리 집” *uljib*— using the plural for the possessive, *Our* house, rather than the singular possessive, *My* house. I asked Diane and Jihyun from our church if I am right on this, and they confirmed that I am, and when I asked them why this is, Jihyun said it’s because of the high value Koreans place on community.

I think we can find something worthwhile in here for our church today.

It’s not just Julian’s baptism; it is a baptism that belongs to all of us. This is why in the Presbyterian church, we do not offer private baptisms unless it’s the only option, such as in a hospital emergency. Baptisms are to be done in the presence of the gathered church, because it is not just the responsibility of the family to raise the child in the faith. It is the responsibility of all of us here: to provide a space for the child to come and learn about God; to teach the child the faith; to demonstrate God’s love to the child; to model and offer forgiveness; and even beyond these walls, to extend care to all God’s children. This goes for adults too, for sometimes it is an adult coming to the font to make their profession of faith for the first time. You don’t have to be a child to have these promises from the church. But we do care for kids, and that care extends from this font, beyond the sanctuary walls. This means we stand up against gun violence, so our kids will be safe at school. It means supporting the Center for Food Action in the last weekend of June— when children who receive free or reduced breakfast and lunch through school will enter a different rhythm, many with long days at home without the support of supplemental nutrition, CFA can make sure that children continue to get consistent, healthy meals. It means looking at having a longer commitment than expected with the Afghan couple we helped to resettle, because they found out last week they are expecting a baby next winter (and I have their permission to tell you this). It means that children and youth— whether inside

these walls or outside these walls, know as they grow that whomever they love and whatever pronouns they use, they are seen, known, and loved by God.

And it means that the people who pass through this font will remember that they are made for relationship: with God, and with one another.

Have you heard the song “Flowers” by Miley Cyrus? I think she has an incredible voice and I love her country twang. I like the song: it’s an anthem of empowerment for a relationship that has gone sour. Here are the words of the chorus:

*I can buy myself flowers  
Write my name in the sand  
Talk to myself for hours  
Say things you don't understand  
I can take myself dancing  
And I can hold my own hand  
Yeah, I can love me better than you can.*

I enjoy the song, and maybe you like it too. But if I keep thinking about it, there is something to it that speaks of the loneliness of this generation. I’m not saying that people should stay with someone who is not treating them right. And I absolutely believe in self love, and in taking the time to do things that honor your relationship with yourself.

But in an age where more and more people are finding their primary medium for entering into relationship involves a screen, I worry about our ability to make and keep meaningful relationships. In the past two weeks, research has come out in at least a couple of ways to show how technology is unraveling our society. Children and youth are suffering from mental health declines stemming from their time on social media. And some top tech creators– including some who have manufactured the technology to create AI– artificial intelligence– have warned us that AI has the capacity to cause destruction at the same level as a pandemic or nuclear weapon.

Obviously, technology is here to stay and we have to figure out how to live with it ethically. Part of that is realizing it is never an adequate substitution for God, and it is never an adequate substitution for real relationships.

Relationships are messy. It’s easier to buy yourself flowers than to let a loved one know you’re disappointed they don’t take the time to show tokens of their care. Being vulnerable with someone else is risky.

But I think about God– who can have it all: the lilies of the field, and all the birds of the air. But it wasn’t enough. So God made us. And not only that, God chose to come down in human flesh, as the person of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, God came to know just how messy and vulnerable human life and love can be. Even when his love sent him to the cross, he came back to invite us to love one another as he has loved us. Our baptism– not yours, or mine, but our baptism, reminds us that God is in it with us, and we are never alone. Thanks be to God. Amen.