

St. Paul: On The Same page

06.15.14 for Trinity

Day One: Genesis 1:1-2,4a

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters... God saw that the light was good...

Many people have told me (excusing their absence from worship) that they feel especially close to God when they are on the golf course or the lake. I try to take them at their word, but in that case I want to ask: Where do you feel most powerfully in God's presence? Where do you sense God with you so strongly that you are moved to talk to him?

Somehow I doubt that the 12th hole, no matter how beautiful it seems, is the place that you pray the best. Fishing is certainly a quiet time in which one might commune with God, but only if you are fishing alone. And, frankly, are your thoughts really focused on God and on his word?

God's creation does move us to think about him and to

marvel at the greatness and beauty of his work. The Bible says it was intended to do that. And yet, God still gave us more than sunsets and landscapes. He gave us his word.

And more than the Bible, God gave us a community. Even at the creation, in the first chapter of Genesis, God did not desire to be alone, and he did not want us to be alone. He created Adam and Eve to live in community with others and with him.

And so, when we see the beauty of God's world, we should want to be with God's greatest creation, our brothers and sisters in Christ. We should want to be in communion with them and with Him in worship.

Even in the Earth's formless and chaotic state, God was present. It was very good for the world to be in God's presence. Now consider, where does your Creator promise to be most present with you today?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, I desire to be with you. Lead me to your word, to your worship, to the Body of Christ, my fellow believers, and to the wonders of your world. Amen.*

Day Two: Acts 2:14a, 22-36

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: ... "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know."²³ This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.²⁴ But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him

Did you have to give a "persuasive speech" to a classroom of your fellow students when you were in high school? I remember doing it. Most of us thought it was torture, and were only too happy just to survive the ordeal. But here is a question we never asked: was anyone persuaded by our speech?

Students chose topics of all kinds. They created outlines approved by the teacher. They wrote the minimum number of words and they spoke for the required number of minutes. Some got excellent grades for their performance.

But no one was persuaded. No one's mind was changed.

It's harder than you think. We can talk all day. We can write comments on the internet. We can send letters to the editor or to our congressman, but is anyone changed by our words?

Peter's sermon is not more amazing than other famous speeches. It is not more eloquent. It's ridiculously short. And yet it has a powerful effect. 3,000 come to faith in Jesus that day by the power of God's Spirit working in them.

You are still unable to deliver a persuasive speech... but can God, working through you? Can you speak ordinary words about what you have seen and how you have known Jesus? Your speech may not be persuasive. It may not be able to change anyone. But God can.

Prayer: *Dearest Lord Jesus, my words are weak and unconvincing, but your presence is powerful and persuasive. Enter my words, direct the thoughts of my heart, and give me courage to speak, so that heaven may be filled with those who know you and praise you for your love. Amen.*

Day Three: Acts 2:15ff

³⁶ *“Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”*

This is what we might call the “punch line” of Peter’s sermon. Suddenly Peter reveals the identity of the man who these people crucified. Do you suppose that some of them said, “I didn’t do it. I never crucified anyone!”

We like to remain distant from uncomfortable things. Our habit is to lay off responsibility on someone else. When a poorly made product causes people to be injured, it’s hard to find exactly who is to blame. When a marriage dies, at first we point fingers at one spouse or the other. But often we end up saying, “it’s no one’s fault really. It just happened.”

Even when crimes are committed, and when we have identified the criminal who did the dirty deed, we still tend to lay blame in the broadest way possible. It was his childhood. It was the schooling. It was television, or movies, or violent games, or drugs, or poverty. It was society that caused these things.

Here is the most amazing thing about Peter’s sermon. His listeners heard his accusation, “Jesus, whom you crucified...” and they knew that they were *each* guilty. They were each, individually, responsible.

There are lots of sinners in this world for whom Jesus died. But each one of us knows, in our heart, that our sins have separated us from our Creator God. No matter what anyone else has done, we were called to love God with all our heart and we did not do so. We are guilty.

No. “I am guilty.” That is the only confession that matters.

Peter’s sermon was not just true for the crowd in front of him. It is still true for you and for me. We are guilty. So what will be our response? Running? Hiding? Making excuses?

Or turning to God – confessing – being washed by him in baptism – and finding new life?

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, it was me. It was my sins for which you died. Thank you, Lord, that it is for me that you have forgiveness and life eternal. Amen.*

Day Four: Matthew 28:16-20

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

What does it mean “but some doubted”? The disciples had seen everything – all of Jesus’ miracles. And they had heard all of his teaching. And they had seen his death and his resurrection. Why does it say now, just before Jesus ascends to heaven, that some doubted?

It does not seem to mean that they did not believe Jesus’ words. After all, they not only worshiped him, but a short time later they risked their lives for their faith in him. So they believed what Jesus was saying. What then did they doubt?

Just as the word “believe” can mean to trust, but it can also mean to agree with or

assent to something. In the same way the word “doubt” can mean to disbelieve, to not accept something as true – but it can also mean to hesitate, to struggle, to be uncertain or fearful.

The disciples believed, and at the same time they doubted. They knew Jesus, and at the same time they were uncertain about the path before them, about Jesus’ plan for them, about all the unknowns ahead of them. They worshiped him, but some doubted.

That’s a familiar feeling, isn’t it? And yet, it didn’t matter. Their weakness did not stop God from being strong and using them as his instruments. Their hesitation did not make God hesitate. And your weakness and doubts do not mean that you are unfit for the kingdom.

On the contrary, as we introduce others to this Jesus whom we struggle to know and love more fully, we also grow in faith. In our weakness, his strength is made perfect.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, I believe. Help my unbelief. And use me, even in my weakness, to glorify your name. Amen.*