

The Creator is the Savior — and Vice Versa.

Trinity Sunday, 5/30/2021, Westminster Presbyterian Church, Akron, OH
Genesis 1:1-5 and Mark 1:4-11
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Your Savior is our Creator. The One who died and rose again for you, who forgives us, accepts us, and gives us hope, is the one God who created us and made all things in the beginning. That's why we say that the one God in whom we believe is three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Today I want to talk about why Christians came to say that and why it's important for us.

We hear the word "God" a lot, and often it means nothing. People use it just to express surprise. For Christians the word means something — but what? What would you say about that to someone who had been brought up with no concept of God? Who is God? The Bible is authoritative for us, so we should see what it says. The word "God" is in the very first verse. **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth"** is the way the biblical story begins in Genesis.

Now if the first sentence of a novel is "Mary wrote a book" or "John built a table", you expect that soon you'll be given some idea of who John or Mary are. If you continue with the creation story, it tells of "God" creating various things — light, water, land and sky, plants, sun and moon, animals, and humans. But that doesn't explain who this "God" character is. How far into the Bible do we need to read before we find out who created the world **"In the beginning"**?

But the Israelites who first heard this story weren't puzzled by it, because it wasn't the first time they'd heard about God! They knew about God freeing their ancestors from bondage in Egypt and bringing them through the sea into the promised land. God was the one who saved them from slavery and created them as a people. That's how the Ten Commandments begin — **"I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me."** The Genesis account was written after those events. So when they heard the story of creation, the identity of the creator wasn't a secret.

The Israelites learned that there is only one God. That is a basic rule, one that a Jewish father will whisper in the ear of his newborn child. *Shema`*, *Yisrael*, *Adonai Elohenu*, *Adonai ehadth*, **"Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, is one LORD."** Imagine Joseph whispering in the ear of the baby in the manger, "The LORD our God is one."

As Jesus grows up, he comes to see the God of Israel as his Father in heaven. At his baptism that feeling of sonship is confirmed, and he's inspired to begin proclaiming

that the Kingdom of God is near. **“Filled with the power of the Spirit,”** Luke’s gospel says, he called people to repent of their sins and be part of the kingdom. He drew crowds of people by his words and actions, announcing the kingdom of God as good news. Some saw him as a prophet like Elijah or Jeremiah. Others thought he might be the promised king, the Messiah, the Christ, whom God would adopt as a Son.

Over the past few weeks of Lent and Easter, we heard how Jesus’ mission ended. Religious leaders in Jerusalem and the Roman authorities saw Jesus as a threat to their power. So he was arrested and quickly gotten rid of — **“crucified, dead, and buried,”** we say in the Apostles’ Creed.

And on **“on the third day he rose again from the dead.”** He appeared to his followers, proclaiming forgiveness and peace to them and calling them to announce the good news of God’s Kingdom to others in his name. That began on Pentecost, when Peter told a Jerusalem crowd to **“Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”**

Pause for a moment and think about that. Peter and the people he spoke to were Jews who believed in the God of Israel. Peter certainly wasn’t telling them to abandon that faith. But he calls them to be baptized in Jesus’ name, and promises them that they will receive the divine Spirit.

As we read through the New Testament we often see Jesus and/or the Holy Spirit being put alongside the God of Israel. The persecutor Saul has a vision of the risen Christ and we’re told that **“immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’”**

A few years later on a missionary journey among Gentiles, Saul (now called Paul) and Silas get thrown in prison, but the cells are opened in the night by an earthquake. The terrified jailer falls on his knee and cries to the apostles, **“What must I do to be saved?”** He probably just meant, “How can I keep from getting the blame for this?” But Paul and Silas seize the opportunity and say, **“Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.”**

Trust in Jesus and you’ll be okay. Paul and Silas knew that First Commandment, **“I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt; ... you shall have no other gods before me.”** Trust in God ahead of all else. But the apostles tell the jailer that if he believes on the Lord Jesus he’ll be saved. In other places in the New Testament, God and Jesus are both referred to as Savior, implying that they’re somehow on the same level.

But Paul also wrote to the Corinthians, that **“No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”** Some Christians speak rather easily about accepting Jesus

as our savior, but we can't just do that on our own. The Holy Spirit has a role in God's saving work, bringing us to faith in Jesus as Lord.

In some texts God, or "God the Father" is connected both with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The First Letter of Peter, for example, is addressed to converts "**who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ.**" And at the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples to baptize people "**in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.**"

It's not my purpose here to "prove" the Doctrine of the Trinity by quoting some Bible verses. Each of them needs to be studied carefully in its own setting. My point now is that as a result of Jesus' resurrection, his followers began very quickly to speak of God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit together. It took about three centuries though, until the Nicene Creed was adopted, for Christians to realize finally that they couldn't say that Christ and the Spirit just part way between the "real" God and creatures, sort of semi-Gods. Somehow there are three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but only one God.

It was the creator of the universe, the one who saved Israel from bondage, who determined to save all people. The one who came into the world to do that was not some entity from celestial middle management but the divine Son of God from eternity. And it is the Spirit of the Father and the Son who calls us to saving faith and keeps us in that faith. They work together. Back in the second century, the Christian teacher Irenaeus spoke of the Son and the Spirit as the two "hands" of the Father, through whom all God's work is done. It's just a picture, but I think a good one.

The creator is our savior. And with all this in mind, we can look back at the opening verses of Genesis. "**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**" But at first there's a "**formless void**" pictured as a chaotic ocean, and "**a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.**" The Hebrew word for "wind" can also be translated "spirit," as in the King James version, or as "breath." Whichever word you choose, you shouldn't forget that the other two are in the background.

"**Then God said 'Let there be light'; and there was light.**" Language about God speaking reminds us as Christians of how the Gospel of John speaks the Word. "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... 'All things came into being through' the Word.** And the Word became flesh as the Son of Mary. We read the creation story in the light of the New Testament. And in that light, we see the Trinity bringing creation into being.

In speaking about the Trinity, some theologians emphasize on the threeness of God, and some stress more the divine oneness. Exactly how that's worked out isn't the crucial question as long as you hold on to both. The point of the doctrine is that the One

who created all things is the One who saves you. The God who sustains the universe is the One in whom you can trust in life and in death.