

7 Easter (C)

Jn 17.20-26

For a very long time now—indeed, since the earliest days of the church—people have recognized there's a striking similarity between the gospel of John and the book of Genesis.

Both books start out very much the same way. Genesis opens with the story of creation: "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep and the spirit of God swept over the face of the waters."

The gospel of John opens in a way that is similar, but is also a bit different: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being."

Because of this and other comparable similarities, it's not too much to say that both books are about creation. The book of Genesis is about the first creation, and the gospel of John is about the new creation...or maybe it's more accurate to say that John is about the *renewal* of creation. And what's common to both books is the way God creates: in both Genesis and in John, God speaks the world into being. Both the first creation and the new creation are brought about by the proclamation of the Word.

In the book of Genesis, the power of God's Word is manifest when God calls forth the elements of the creation out of the primordial chaos. God says, "Let there be light," and light comes forth out of the darkness. God says, "Let there be a dome to separate the waters," and the world comes forth out of the depths. God says, "Let the waters be gathered together," and the dry land comes forth out of the waters. God speaks; God's Word is proclaimed in the midst of the chaos and the darkness, and out of that chaos and that darkness appears light and order and life.

I think we see much the same thing happening in this morning's gospel. God speaks—the Word goes forth—and a new creation is born. In the first creation, God calls light out of darkness, he calls the world out of the depths, he calls the land out of the waters. In the second creation, the new creation, God calls forth glory out of shame, he calls forth joy out of despair, he calls forth unity out of discord, and he calls forth love out of enmity.

So let's look at how this happens. How is it that God brings forth this new creation, and what role does Jesus play in all of this? And what about us? Where are we in all of this?

Today's gospel is just one part of what's sometimes called the "high priestly prayer" of Jesus. The whole "high priestly prayer" is actually quite a bit longer than the part we heard a few moments ago; in fact, the "high priestly prayer" takes up an entire chapter in John's account of the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus offers this prayer during the last supper he shares with his disciples just before he's arrested and handed over to the Romans for trial.

We call this prayer the "high priestly prayer" because of the way Jesus prays and what he prays

for. Throughout most of the prayer, he's praying for his disciples, both his first disciples and those who would believe in him because of the testimony of his first disciples. In other words, Jesus is praying for the whole church. In other words, he's praying for us, and for you.

And what he's praying for is that we would be joined to him. He prays that through the ministry he offers—the ministry of his life—we would be united to him and would thereby experience the same blessing, the same joy, the same love that he himself experiences in his relationship with his Father. In this prayer, Jesus stands before the Father and asks on our behalf, "What you have given to me, please give to them."

So Jesus is the one through whom God brings the new creation into being. Jesus is portrayed here as the incarnate Word, the Word that calls into being a new kind of existence.

The Word goes forth and calls glory out of shame. Jesus prays, "Father, glorify me so that I may glorify you. Glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed."

The prayer Jesus offers is one that is wholly captive to a vision of the glory of God. And because he is wholly captive to the glory of God, Jesus is able to see his life and to see the world in light of that glory. The beauty and the wonder and the majesty of God is the horizon wherein Jesus sees himself and the world and us. And it's that same glory he prays would be revealed to us. He prays, "Father, the glory you have shown to me I have shown to them; may they see the glory that I see, the glory of your love."

This is a new creation. The first creation is one that is governed by shame; the first creation is subject to dishonor and disgrace and remorse. By virtue of his death on the cross, Jesus knows something about shame and disgrace. But because he is the incarnate Word he is able to transform that shame into something else entirely: out of shame he calls forth glory, out of dishonor he calls forth honor, out of apparent defeat he calls forth victory. God speaks a Word of glory and a new creation comes into being, and Jesus prays that his glory, the glory of his Father, would be manifest to us and in us.

The Word goes forth and calls joy out of despair. Jesus prays, "Father, I ask these things so that they may have my joy in them and that my joy might be made complete in them."

The intimacy of the relationship between the Father and the Son is marked by joy. There's no room in their relationship for frustration or disappointment or distress. It is the Father's joy to give his glory to the Son, and it is the Son's joy to receive all things from his Father.

This is a new creation. The first creation is one that is governed by despair; the first creation is subject to distress and frustration and disappointment. But through his incarnate Word God calls forth joy out of despair, he calls forth peace out of distress and fulfillment out of disappointment. God speaks a Word of joy and a new creation comes into being, and Jesus prays that his joy would be made complete in us.

The Word goes forth and calls unity out of discord. Jesus prays, "Father, may they all be one as

you and I are one. As I am in you and as you are in me, may they be in us and may we be in them so that they might be one as we are one.”

The unity of the Father and the Son is so profound that Jesus can even say, “The one who has seen me has seen the Father.” The Father gives all things to the Son. This is a point Jesus makes repeatedly throughout John’s gospel: the Father has given all judgment to the Son, the Father has given all authority to the Son, the Father has given the whole world to the Son.

This is a new creation. The first creation is governed by dissent; the first creation is subject to hostility and suspicion and conflict. But through his incarnate Word God calls forth unity out of dissent, he calls forth relationship out of hostility, and reconciliation out of conflict. God speaks a Word of unity and a new creation comes into being, and Jesus prays that the unity he shares with his Father would be realized in us.

The Word goes forth and calls love out of enmity. Jesus prays, “Father, may the love you have for me be in them, so that the world might know that you have sent me and that you have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Love is the essence of the relationship between the Father and the Son. For us, love is a quality; it’s a feature or an attribute of some of the relationships we have. For God, love is more than that; love is not just a way of *describing* the relationship between the Father and the Son, love *is* the relationship between the Father and the Son. The love between the Father and the Son is the Holy Spirit. This is the gift God gives to the world in Jesus.

This is a new creation. The first creation is not governed by love; the first creation wants love and longs for love and will sometimes do anything for love, but the first creation is also afraid of love. But through the incarnate Word God calls forth love out of fear, he calls forth mutuality out of autonomy, he brings intimacy out of estrangement. God speaks a Word of love and a new creation comes into being, and Jesus prays that the love of the relationship between him and his Father would be the essence of our relationship with him as well.

Glory out of shame. Joy out of despair. Unity out of discord. Love out of enmity. Life out of death. This is what Jesus is praying for. And he’s not just praying that we experience these things in the abstract; he’s praying that we experience these things as they exist in the relationship he shares with his Father. God opens the divine life and invites us to come inside and to partake of the same joy, the same unity, the same love that he himself experiences in himself. That’s the meaning of this season of Easter, the season we’ve observed for the last two months.

In John’s gospel, the first disciples are said to have experienced this gift of new creation when they encountered the risen Lord and when they experienced the coming of the Holy Spirit. Today marks the beginning of a transition; we prepare to move from the season of Easter to the celebration of Pentecost. Next week we’ll celebrate the coming of the Spirit and the advent of the new creation in the life of the church.

It is the Spirit who exists as the bond of love between the Father and the Son, and because of that

the Spirit is also the bond of love between us and God. It is through the Spirit that God works in our lives to conform us as individuals and as a community into the image of his Son. It is through the Spirit that God works in our lives to bring glory out of shame, to bring joy out of despair, to bring unity out of discord, to bring love out of enmity, to bring life out of death.

So this day we give thanks for the prayer our Lord offers on our behalf, and we pray that when he comes in the power of his Holy Spirit we might be found ready to welcome him and to receive all that he has in store for us. Amen.

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Trinity Episcopal Cathedral
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