

**Opening Prayer**

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

**Genesis 1:1-2:4**

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup>the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. <sup>3</sup>Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. <sup>6</sup>And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” <sup>7</sup>So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. <sup>8</sup>God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day. <sup>9</sup>And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. <sup>10</sup>God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup>Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. <sup>12</sup>The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. <sup>13</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, the third day. <sup>14</sup>And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, <sup>15</sup>and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. <sup>16</sup>God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. <sup>17</sup>God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, <sup>18</sup>to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day. <sup>20</sup>And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” <sup>21</sup>So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup>God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” <sup>23</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup>And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. <sup>25</sup>God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>26</sup>Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” <sup>27</sup>So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup>God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” <sup>29</sup>God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. <sup>30</sup>And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. <sup>31</sup>God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. <sup>2</sup>Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. <sup>2</sup>And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. <sup>3</sup>So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. <sup>4</sup>These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

## **Commentary**

In this foundational story of creation, we see God creating order out of chaos. This is something God is always at work doing in our modern world and lives as well. The Spirit of God was brooding over the water – pondering and considering what to do with this chaos, darkness, and formless void. Into this void God brought light – that first flicker of creation. There is no reason that modern science and the Bible have to be seen as contradictory on the question of the origins of the world. They say different things because they speak from different times and cultures and because they ask two different questions. Science asks *how* the world came into existence, while the biblical narrative wants to know *why*. The biblical author makes it clear that the world came into being by the will of God. God orders creation by a word and names what God has done. We see in this narrative that humanity is created in the image of God. Despite our observed faults and flaws, there are aspects of the human being that are godlike. We hear God proclaim a blessing on humanity. It is a blessing on the image of God found in all of us.

## **Reflection**

1. What do you believe about God and creation? Do science and the Bible clash for you in the creation story?
2. How do you celebrate the image of God in yourself? In others?

## **2 Corinthians 13:11-13**

<sup>11</sup>Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. <sup>12</sup>Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. <sup>13</sup>The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

### **Commentary**

The Corinthian church had problems in finding unity, making peace with Paul, and preparing the offering for Jerusalem. Paul begins this closing section by repeating a familiar refrain: put things in order. In other words, pay attention to what I have said, work out your differences, and learn to live in peace. When Paul refers to “saints,” he is not thinking of one who is holier than others, but one who is part of the community of believers, a follower of Jesus. Paul’s benediction names all three persons in the Trinity. The early church developed the doctrine of the Trinity to reflect the three different ways in which people experience God. God the Holy Spirit awakens in us a hunger for God and guides us in our spiritual quest. God the Savior renews and redeems us through our Lord Jesus Christ. God the creator made heaven and earth. It was at the Councils of Nicaea (325 A.D.) and Chalcedon (431 A.D.) where the doctrine of the Trinity was given formal voice: God is both three and one, three persons in one Godhead. Whenever we speak of one person in the Trinity, we speak of all three. The Trinity is relational, not subordinate. God is described by Jesus as *Father*; God is incarnate in the *Son*; God as *Holy Spirit* is present with us.

### **Reflection**

1. What does the idea of the Trinity mean to you? Which aspect of God do you most relate to and why?
2. Over the last two decades, most churches have moved toward a more inclusive, gender-inclusive God language. What language do you prefer to use for God? Does it disturb you to hear others use different God language?

## **Matthew 28:16-20**

<sup>16</sup>Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. <sup>17</sup>When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup>And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

## **Commentary**

We do not know what mountain Jesus directed his disciples to, because, for Matthew, a mountain is a matter of theology, not of geography. The mountain is the place where God reveals God's self. The location of the mountain is irrelevant, while the revelation of God is paramount. As the risen Christ proclaimed that all authority was his, he affirmed that he was the ruler of the cosmos. These disciples were then instructed to go to all nations and disciple them. They were not only to call individuals to faith, but to do so as part of the community. They were to be disciples and to live out their faith within the Christian community. This is still true today. We need to gather as the body of Christ to be disciples. It is in this unity and kinship that we find support, nurture, accountability, and vision to help us move along the path of discipleship. It is amazing to note that, even in the presence of the resurrected Jesus, some still doubted. There were still questions in their minds about the path Jesus was calling them to follow and their ability to walk that path. Could they rely on God to bless and be with them on this risky venture to which Jesus was calling them? The mission to disciple the world today is still given to a worshipping, yet doubting, community of disciples. Again, in the words given for baptism, we find the concept of the Trinity. Baptism is the sacrament of initiation, when we move from the outside to the inside of the community of faith. To be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit means that we come into the community under the power of the complete Godhead. The teaching role of the church is also emphasized here. The disciple's task was to call believers to obedience to the Christ who saves and who promises to be with them to the end of the age.

## **Reflection**

1. Reflect on doubt as "searching faith"? Are we sometimes called to "act as if" our faith has no doubts as we grow in faith and knowledge of God?
2. Remember your baptism. How has that sacrament of initiation been lived out in your life over the years?

## **Closing Prayer**

Grant, O Lord, that what has been said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.