

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
 East Moline, Illinois  
 Pastor Becky Sherwood  
**June 7, 2020, Trinity Sunday**  
 Genesis 1:1-2:4a, II Corinthians 13:11-13  
**CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD**

On Tuesday the Presbytery of Great Rivers met for our regular meeting, by Zoom of course. We were joined by the Co-Moderator of our General Assembly of the National Presbyterian Church, The Rev. Cindy Kohmann. She gave us a powerful image of what these days are like when she told us that we as a nation are living through the Influenza World Pandemic of 1918, the Great Depression of the 1930's, and the Race Riots of 1968, all at the same time.

Dear beloved children of God, this had already been a season that had stretched us, strained us, and changed us, broken our hearts, and challenged our hearts, and opened our eyes.

And now in the past two weeks of necessary protesting, and uncalled for looting and rioting, and curfews here in the Quad Cities and around the country, we are being brought face to face with the fractured racial divides within our country. We are seeing the systemic racism and divides that some of us live with every day, and some of us are often protected from day by day.

Following the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis last week, and before him the murder of Ahmed Aubrey in Georgia, and Breonna Taylor in her own home in Louisville and David McAtee outside his business in Louisville, we are going deeper into a season that is stretching us, straining us, changing us, breaking our hearts, and necessarily challenging us at deep levels, individually and as a nation.

I come to this sermon this morning with so much in my heart. This has been two weeks of such deep sorrow as I've watched the broken divides, and unwarranted deaths, in our nation.

This has been a time of feeling so disconnected from you in a time when I long for face to face conversations to hear how each of you is walking through these days.

I long for the day we can worship together in this sanctuary in a way that is safe for all of us.

I long for the day when our hands will reach out to each other as we sing "We are One in the Spirit."

But until then I hold onto the memories of all the times we have done that in the past, and to believe that God's Spirit connects us as we sing together from a safe distance from our homes.

As I imagine us gathered together in this place, I think about both what divides us and Who unites us. It is no surprise to any of you when I say that we are a diverse congregation, each with our own understandings and stories of ethnicity and race, our own political leanings, our own lenses through which we look at the world, our own experiences of unity and division and diversity in our homes, our neighborhoods, our community, our country, and our world.

We each have our own stories, some we tell each other, some we hide, some we hold close to our hearts.

Sunday by Sunday, in person, and now through God's connecting us through technology, we gather and we reach past our divisions, in Christ's grace and power, to the brothers and sisters that we are in Jesus' name.

On this Trinity Sunday, it is that truth of our unity in God, we are called to witness and uphold and carry with us from this time of worship.

We gather together in the name of our God, who creates us all in God's image.

We gather together, united by our trinitarian God:

Our God who creates and parents, the Spirit who breathes through our lives,  
Jesus the Son who comes and lives among us and saves us.

We see unity in the community of our God.

This morning we must let ourselves be changed and challenged again by the good news, that every single one of us is created in the image of God, as we read from Genesis:

“So God created humankind in God's image,  
in the image of God, God created them;

male and female God created them...

and God looked at everything that God had created and behold it was very good.”

We are all God's children, created in God's image, and God's creation is very good.

No matter our race,  
no matter the color of our skin,  
no matter our socioeconomic status,  
no matter our age,

God's creation is very good,

no matter our politics,  
no matter our religion, or no religion,  
no matter our leanings to the right or to the left,  
no matter our gender, or our gender identity,

God's creation is very good

no matter our feelings as we watch the protests, or we march in the protests,  
or we support the protests or we oppose the protests,  
no matter our very different opinions about just about everything,

we are all God's children, created in God's image, and God's creation is very good.

We are invited to hold onto this powerful picture of our creating God,

who gave us the gift of the earth,  
and all that fills it,

and then gave us the gift of each other,  
and all that fills us,

every one of us different,  
all of us children of our creating God.

It is with the eyes and the heart of God that we are called this morning to look at every single person God puts

in our path,  
on our news feed,  
in local and national leadership,  
in local and national law enforcement,  
in our families and friends,

and especially that person that doesn't agree with our truth,  
 and we who follow Jesus Christ are called to see them as  
 beloved children of God,  
 created in God's image,  
 every single one of them,  
 no exceptions,  
 beloved children of God.

On Tuesday at our Presbytery meeting we heard a powerful story of what this healing inclusivity in the face of division can look like. Co-Moderator, the Rev. Cindy Kohmann, held up the Moderator's Cross that she and all the General Assembly moderators since 1983 before her have worn during their one or two years of service to the national Presbyterian church. It is 3 Celtic crosses pinned together at the center of the cross-beams of the cross. She rotated them on this pin so we could see the three crosses.

She told us that the story of these crosses begins soon after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in World War II, when fear of Japanese Americans became so great in this nation. All persons who were Japanese were seen as a threat to national security. In parts of our country, including where I grew up in the Pacific Northwest, they were forced to leave their homes and their possessions, and imprisoned in internment camps for the duration of the war. (If you do not know this tragic part of our American history, I encourage you to educate yourselves).

At 4<sup>th</sup> Street Presbyterian Church in Chicago the Pastor and the Session said no to this practice of blaming all Japanese citizens. Another Presbyterian Church in Chicago had banished all of its Japanese members and forced them to leave the church. These Christian Presbyterians came to Session of 4<sup>th</sup> Street Presbyterian and asked permission to worship there. Although divided, the Session majority voted to say yes, they would welcome this Japanese congregation. Throughout all the Sundays of the war, their pastor Dr. Anderson, stood on the street in his pastor's robes, welcoming them to worship and preventing any attacks on them there on the street outside the church.

At the end of the war, this small Japanese congregation took up a collection and gave it to the pastor in thanksgiving for the church's welcome to them. Dr. Anderson took the offering with him on a planned trip to Iona in Scotland, an early home of Christianity in the British Isles. While there he bought two medium sized Celtic crosses. On his return to the United States he presented them to the moderators of the two largest Presbyterian denominations who had split north and south over slavery during the Civil War. (PCUS AND PCUSA) He felt so strongly about the hope of reunion, because his great-grandfather had made the substitute motion of the floor of the General Assembly that led to the denomination splitting in the 1860's into the northern and south Presbyterian denominations.

Later he purchased a third cross for the other Northern Presbyterian Denomination (UPCNA). When the two northern factions reunited in 1958 those two crosses were pinned together and worn by the moderators of the northern General Assembly.

Finally, in 1983 at the General Assembly when the northern and southern Presbyterian denominations were finally joined together, after being apart since the Civil War, those three crosses were there. The two joined crosses from the north and the one from the south were processed up onto the platform, and in front of 5,000 Presbyterians, a metal worker of Japanese descent, with trembling hands, welded those three crosses together with a central rivet pin joining the crosses, and symbolically the denominations, together.

Told at the Presbytery of Great Rivers Assembly meeting, June 2, 2020.  
 See also: *Sealed in Christ, The Symbolism of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*,  
 John M. Mulder, Westminster/John Knox Press

In the trinity of crosses worn by our Presbyterian moderators each year, we see a symbol of our church and our world, broken by the sin of racism, and healed and welded together by Christ's love.

We see a powerful picture of what can happen when we see each other as beloved, created, children of God.

We see the power of love.

We see who we are called to be in Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake.

May it be so, in your life and in mine, and in our world. Amen.

Trusting in that love of God I invite you to join me in proclaiming our faith, using part of the Brief Statement of Faith of the PCUSA. This statement was written following the reuniting of the northern and southern Presbyterian Denominations (1991). It is printed in the bulletins you received by email or mail.

Let us confess what we believe:

We trust in God the Holy Spirit,

everywhere the giver and renewer of life.

The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,

sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,

and binds us together with all believers

in the one body of Christ, the church.

In a broken and fearful world

the Spirit gives us courage

to pray without ceasing,

to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,

to unmask idolatries in church and culture,

to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,

and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.

In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,

we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks

and to live holy and joyful lives,

even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,

praying, Come, Lord Jesus!