

June 7, 2020 Trinity Sunday

Genesis 1:1—2:4a, Psalm 8, 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Matthew 28:16-20

[Richard Rohr quote is from his book *The Divine Dance*. Debie Thomas quotes it in her piece for this date (posted on 5-31-20) in *Journey with Jesus*. Also, here is *Sweet Honey and the Rock* with Ella's Song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2T216XqiO0>]

Grace to you, mercy to you, in the name of the Triune God: Creator, Christ, and Sustainer. Amen.

Thresholds. We have a sweet new dog, named Ace, who joined our family in May.

He's a rescue dog, a hound they tell us, with a story, a history, that we'll never fully know.

For whatever reason, Ace does not like crossing thresholds.

The back door, the front door, the bedroom doorway, the bottom of the stairs...

With great regularity Ace is momentarily immobilized as we cross from one space to the next.

With a gentle tug and some goading encouragement usually sweet Ace will cross over.

But clearly it gives him pause.

I've been thinking of thresholds these last days.

With Ace it's the physical thresholds of coming and going.

With many of you and our society, it's countless other thresholds:

small and large,

joyful and heartbreaking,

deeply personal and boldly systemic.

It's the retirements, earlier than planned, with less closure than we'd like or need.

It's the diagnosis or even the clean bill of health, the shift in our own self-identity.

It's more and more re-opening related to COVID, and yet still worry, and illness, and the loss of life.

Thresholds.

It was me on Friday evening, by myself in the kitchen, weeping over the i-pad as I watched the video our daughter's kindergarten teacher had posted early that morning:

"It's the last day of school," she reminded those 5 and 6 year olds that she could not hug.

"You've learned so much! I'll miss you, and I love you."

It's my neighbors gathered in the backyard listening to the commencement ceremony,

erupting in joyful whoops as their young person's name is announced.

More thresholds.

It's the heaviness of these last days with their curfews and helicopters and anxiety,

now shifting to quieter times and yet so much work to be done.

It's a complex mix of...everything: grief, rage, anger, despair, pain, withdrawal, hope, exhaustion, confusion.

It's people out on the streets, some for the first time, others for the umpteenth time,

with protest or prayers, bottles of water and diapers to donate, petitions to sign.
It's Reverend Sharpton's decisive words,
 "It's time to stand up in George's name and say get your knee off our necks!"
It is time, past time; it is time.
So many threshold.

Our dog, Ace, may falter at the threshold, uncertain, unsure, hopeful, yet terrified.

That response may not be so different for you and for me,
 for the giant behemoth of tightly braided institutions
 with 400 years of codified law and entrenched culture.
It is time, past time, and we stand on this threshold.

Could this be the time? Can change really come?

Can we muster the will?
Do we believe the truth?
What is to be gained? What must be lost?
Can we look white supremacy in the eye and push back?
 Can we keep pushing, even pushing back when the white supremacy is within us?
Can we muster strong, brave, non-violent leadership when what feels like civil war threatens?

We stand upon this threshold, dear friends.

It makes my heart race with uncertainty and with fear,
 with a enough hope to know that justice must come and that we must be part of it.

Our scriptures this morning offer guidance when we're on the thresholds.

I could say a lot about these, but let me just offer three notes, hear me out:

First, remember that we are created in God's good image.

The psalmist sings: "When I consider the heavens, the work of your fingers, what are mere mortals?
 And yet you have made them little less than divine."
In Genesis, the days are marked by the refrain: "God saw that it is good."
Finally on day six God breathes: "Let us make humankind in our image, in God's image."
Good. Blessed. Beloved.
The Orthodox side of the Christian family reminds us that we are in a process of returning to divinity.

So what does it mean that we can look at one another as divine?

Indeed, black lives are beloved, too often this has been forgotten. They matter.

Black lives are created in the image of the divine, and must be protected as sacred.

How often have we closed our eyes to the divinity in black and brown bodies?

How easily has our system forgotten this truth?

We of every skin-tone are created in the image of God, the good and beautiful image of God.

Secondly, remember your walking partners.

In the gospel, we hear this small snippet from the very final threshold of Matthew's Gospel.

In all the upheaval the disciples had experienced, in all the chaos we've known

Jesus says, "Go and disciple" others.

This word disciple is about following, about walking together.

However people are anchored in faith,

we're inviting others to walk with us into a new vision of how the world can be.

A new way of seeing...naming what is pinching, constricting.

A new way of repair...confessing what is broken, making real amends.

A new way of hearing what needs transformation in the systems.

It's the culture of policing, the system of justice that is in question.

We're inviting others to walk with a new energy for change.

Thirdly, remember just how complex order and peace can be.

On the threshold, at the very end of Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians, he writes:

"put things in order...agree with one another, live in peace."

It sounds nice enough, doesn't it?

It's tempting, especially for those of us who live in white skin, to hear this as a plea for law and order,

a cry for business as usual.

But through the pandemic, and in these days since Mr. Floyd's death,

it has become all the more clear how suffocating and deadly a veneer of order, a superficial peace, can be, especially to our neighbors with black and brown skin.

The truth is, we don't just need order, but we need a new order, a new way, a new justice.

That will cause some dis-comfort in the coming.

Finally, it's Trinity Sunday.

I had planned to talk about creeds and such today, that will wait.

On this threshold, let's lean into the gentle and powerful Trinity,
the brilliance of a God who is inherently relational.

We are created in God's image,
and that means we, too, are inherently relational, interconnected.

When we're scared by all that is new and overwhelming.

When we're tempted to hunker down, go it alone, avoid interacting, lest we get it "wrong".

When it's all just so much, so heavy...breathe, and remember what binds us.

Richard Rohr writes, "*Start with the Three and see that this is the deepest nature of the One.*"

Remember the dynamic-ness of God, the flow of God, widening, welcoming.

Remember the diversity of God, not sameness, but difference.

Remember how God, in God's very self, is communal, intimate, honest.

Dear friends, this is hard. It's so very hard. I won't tell you otherwise.

But God is with us. God, in whose very image we and our beloved neighbors are created, God is with us.

And so we stand on this threshold looking back, looking ahead.

If you are like our sweet dog Ace and uncertain or unsure at the threshold.

if you are hopeful, if you are terrified, if you are all this and more, all at once, it's real.

And God is with us, nudging us across the threshold,

encouraging us farther than we can yet see.

Our next song is a beauty, sung by Sweet Honey and the Rock.

You can listen, you can join in.

This is called Ella's song.

It's Bernice Johnson Reagon's lyrics and music based on the words of Ella Baker.

Ella Baker was an influential activist through the civil right movement and beyond.

"We who believe in freedom cannot rest."

That was Ella's wisdom as she encouraged others in the movement,

as she made space for creative, faithful discernment in the threshold moments of her time.

It seems we are at yet another threshold moment.

Beloved ones, may God bless you on this threshold,

May God bless you with the truth that you, too, are created in God's good image,

May God bless you with companions with whom to walk and learn and pray.

May God bless you with the Spirit's power of humility and deep, sustaining love. Amen.