

June 4, 2023 Holy Trinity Sunday
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Genesis 1:1—2:4, Psalm 8, 2 Corinthians 13:11-13
Matthew 28:16-20

[Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer, Preface.

Quote about the trinity from SALT's commentary for Holy Trinity, Relationships Are Who We Are, May 30, 2023:

<https://www.saltproject.org/progressive-christian-blog/2020/6/1/relationships-are-who-we-are-salts-lectionary-commentary-for-trinity-sunday.>]

The grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you, Beloved. Amen.

I've brought along today a braid of sweet grass.

For years, our neighbors, the Browns, watched our house when we were out of town.

After one time away, we arrived home

and soon Bev Brown, a proud indigenous woman, knocked on the back door.

With this braided sweetgrass in hand, she wanted us to use it to welcome in the spirits.

As Robin Wall Kimmerer begins the preface to her book Braiding Sweetgrass,

she writes first of sweetgrass, and then of braiding.

"Hold out your hands," she says, "and let me lay upon them a sheaf of freshly picked sweetgrass. . . .

Breathe it in and you start to remember things you didn't know you'd forgotten."

Then going on, she describes braiding sweetgrass, and that bit of necessary tension,

easiest to achieve by braiding with a partner.

One person holds the end, so that you "pull gently against each other,

all the while leaning in head to head, chatting and laughing, watching each other's hands,

one holding steady while the other shifts the slim bundles over one another, each in turn."

In this stunning book, Robin Wall Kimmerer braids together science and spirit and story,

the intertwining of her training as a botanist and professor,

and her identify as a mother, and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation.

Dear ones, on this Holy Trinity Sunday, I've got braiding on my mind and in my fingers,

And there is much to pull together, and a bit of tension to hold.

Let me lay out some of the strands.

This morning there is scripture.

You've heard it, in fact you've read it, the very beginning of the canon:

the first of the creation stories, ancient wisdom from Genesis:

On the first day, and God called them, and it was so, and God saw that it was good.

The rhythmic flow, layer upon layer, making meaning.

And so, too we heard the very last words of Matthew's gospel: Go, disciple, teach.

And remember, "remember I am with you always to the end of the age."

Scripture is one strand today, though truly it's a sheaf, many strands brought together:

the weaving of the oral and written tradition,

different voices, different cultures, different generations, different intentions.

Then there is the Holy-Trinity-Sunday strand.

At creation the Spirit broods.

Jesus at times speaks of his oneness with God,

and then at other times he's name dropping about his Abba God, or the Advocate, the Holy Spirit.

Over the centuries (and here I mean a ways after Jesus),

through the councils of the church, and the creeds,

the doctrine of the Holy Trinity arises.

In retrospect this all looks orderly, but it wasn't: there was blood, sweat and tears poured into this,

winners and losers, some deemed heretics, centuries of honing.

Eventually, we come to understand the idea that God is "both Three and One.

Not three Gods — for that would miss God's oneness.

And not merely One — for that would miss God's three-ness,

and wouldn't do justice to the sense of encountering God in Jesus and the Holy Spirit."

Eventually, we have an agreement on the Holy Trinity, yet, let's be honest, in that braid there is tension.

Tension, for so often doctrines like the Holy Trinity are woven into empire,

co-opted by the powers,

used as a way of creating conformity, with one way of thinking, one way of believing.

I love the Holy Trinity for its sense of mystery and relationship.

We have a God who is made known most truly in relationship!

The three parts of God coaxing one another into being,

holding the tension,

intertwining in an elaborately simple and beautiful dance.

The Trinity teaches us—indeed, models for us—how to be in relationship.

Relationship with one another, and most truly with the whole creation. --*God knows* we need to practice!

And the problematic, complicated, painful, messy history is important to hold in tension.

Beloved, without naming it, without holding that tension,

we too easily are the empire's church,

rather than God's church, followers of Jesus, people of relationship.

Finally, in our worship this morning is a strand we'll call Rogation.

No, we Lutherans don't often celebrate Rogation,

so it's unfamiliar to many of us, but we can celebrate it.

Rogation comes through the history of the church, from as early as the 5th and 6th centuries.

It has to do with blessing the fields at the start of the planting season.

Usually it is celebrated just before Ascension, so we're a little late,

but today we incorporate Rogation in our service.

Now the word Rogation is what intrigues me the most.

It comes for the Latin verb **Rogare**, and it threads through Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese:

It means to ask, to ask for, to beg, to urge, to pray.

From what I can figure,

it's asking for these blessings, praying for the lands and creation, crying out for healing.

Here at Hope, back in December, for Advent, we focused our worship on the theme *All Earth Is Waiting*.

If you were around, you might recall how round earths with their abstract blues and greens

blessed our worship space

You created them, adding the color, writing prayers and reflections about what we are waiting for, like:

peace, love, justice, joy,

compassion, rest, and understanding, safety,

relationship,

my family to get along, a chance to make a difference.

Waiting for less anger and less gun violence,

for better health.

We're waiting for a world where my children don't have to have anxiety about the future of the earth.

a time when the world doesn't seem so scary.

We're waiting for a world where we think about how our actions affect future generations,

This morning, braiding together the many strands,

in the spirit of Rogation,

we use those prayers of Advent.

We cry out for the earth.

We pray for all of creation.

We ask God's blessing as we re-commit ourselves to being part of the healing.

All those earths, with their prayers of waiting, have been re-created into little containers
that hold succulents.

At the end of worship we invite you to take one home, praying for the healing of creation.

I'm also thinking today also about our letter writing for Bread for the World.

This morning we have a chance to write to our Senators and Representative in Washington DC,

asking, urging (did you hear that? rogare) asking them to re-authorize the Farm Bill.

This gigantic bill supports farmers, but also those who are food insecure in our country, and abroad.

The farm bill includes the SNAP program, that's what we used to call Food Stamps.

We ask for SNAP to function more equitably.

I hope you'll consider writing or signing a letter today, it's quick, and the impact is massive.

You know: I've been thinking about that day, probably 20 years ago,

when our neighbor Bev Brown stood before us with the braided sweetgrass.

She gave us the braid, explaining in detail what to do and how to do it.

We received it, but asked her, couldn't she just do the blessing?

It wasn't our tradition, it never felt like ours to do.

But, truth is, she didn't, and we didn't,

and now I stand before you with the braid still in hand.

I'd forgotten how life moves on, and the braided strands of our lives, they're messy, aren't they?

Filled with their own tensions, regrets and grace, grief and joy, and so much more to learn.

Dear ones, on these busy early summer days, with all they hold,

may we lean into one another and into God.

May we braid together our lives and the community God is still creating,

holding that holy tension,

finding our way in relationships,

doing our best and trusting God's grace,

waiting—along with the earth—for the healing of creation.

and remembering—remembering “things you didn't know you'd forgotten.” Amen