

“A Tale Older than Time”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

June 4, 2023 - Trinity Sunday

[Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Matthew 28:16-20](#)

Moments ago, you heard the beautiful creation story of Genesis being read. Here’s a very different version of the beginning of things...

In the beginning, Tiamat, the dragon goddess of the chaotic ocean depths, and her consort Apsu, the god of fresh water, merged, and Tiamat birthed a host of divine creatures. As these divine creatures grew, some of them became too noisy, disturbing their father Apsu’s peace, and so she planned to destroy them. But the noisy children of Apsu, aware of his plan, captured him first and murdered him. Furious at her partner’s fate, Tiamat birthed a whole host of venom-filled dragons to make war on her other children. Sure enough, war between the gods ensued, ending only when the storm god Marduk slew Tiamat, forming the earth and heavens from her destroyed body, and then conquered her supporting gods. Marduk then reigned supreme and formed people to be his slaves, destined to live out their days to serve him and the other gods, allowing them to always be at leisure.

This version of the beginnings of the heavens and earth and the people who live on the earth, from the ancient Mesopotamian creation story known today as the *Enuma Elish*, is very different from the creation story that we heard moments ago from the book of Genesis, but it is the story that the children of the Israelites would have heard and known well as they lived as exiles in the land of Babylon, which is likely why today’s lesson from Genesis 1 was written, so that the children of Israel would learn a counter-story, using many of the motifs of the Babylonian creation myth, but that aligned with their own beliefs, practices, and worldview.

And this is precisely what the beautiful account of creation in Genesis does. This poetic text, which was never intended to be understood as historical or scientific, was written so that the people of Israel would recognize that they did not come to be through a chaotic and bloody struggle between warring gods, but that they came into existence through an orderly speaking of the unseen, all-powerful God of all creation. It was this God of order, not an array of destructive gods, who

created, appearing as an unseen wind or breath, the feminine word *ruach* in Hebrew, that hovered over and covered the face of the chaotic watery depths, or *tehom* in Hebrew, a word directly related to the name of the goddess Tiamat. And according to Genesis, the watery chaos was conquered when the unseen God of all breathed out words that ordered that which was disordered and then declared all things to be beautiful and good.

According to Genesis, people, like the rest of creation, were created as beautiful and good. And just as God created the night and the day and all of the beautiful liminal spaces in between -- the twilight times and those glorious moments at the rising and setting of the sun -- so God created people, male and female and all of their fabulous kinds in between, and called them all beautiful and good. And God, who is both the feminine *Ruach* and the one Jesus called Father, created people with all their different kinds to continue God's work of creating and making beautiful all that which is chaotic, violent, and disordered, and to care for this good, beautiful, and diverse world of God.

And so we learn along with the children of Israel, in the creation story of Genesis, who we are, who God is, and what we are to be about as God's appointed caretakers of the earth and its creatures.

The challenge for us is to embrace our calling and live as loving and responsible caretakers of the planet and its creatures, which includes caring for one another. Too often, enticed by selfish greed, we become consumers rather than caretakers, and seek to gain at the expense of others or the world we share, but this path leads to ruin. And so we remind ourselves this morning that we, as God's children, are to take a different path that leads instead to beauty, goodness, and peace.

And blessing is the way of this blessed path. Baptized into the family of Christ's disciples, we continue to follow in his way of blessing others through selfless acts of love. Our path of loving leads us into the world, especially to the places where chaos and cruelty seem to reign, so that we might bless and transform the world through our living in the better way of loving service. In the places where we live, we bless by loving out loud, offering messages that create and nourish life, celebrating the diversity of it, rather than uttering words of hate and exclusion that destroy both the recipient and the sender. And we seek to bless the planet,

rather than just taking from it in ways that rob generations to come of well-being and peace.

This day, let us all take seriously our calling to live as children of a creating and caring God through our own work to make things good and beautiful. God, who made all things good, who showed us in Christ how to live in loving fellowship with the creation, and whose Wind moves within us to create a better world for tomorrow, will be blessed and so will we. May it be so. Amen.