

Scripture:

Psalm 121

Genesis 1:1- 2:4

Matthew 28:16-20

“God is with us.”

19<sup>th</sup> century poet and priest --- Gerard Manley Hopkins writes ---- in perhaps his most famous poem --- God’s Grandeur ---

“The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed.

Why do men then now not reckon his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.”

The world is charged with the beauty ---- the grandeur of God.

And today we enjoy --- and we worship in some of the grandeur and beauty of God.

And it’s fitting as we worship outdoors to read the story of creation.

As a Christian I believe unequivocally that God created the world --- that the trees and birds and fish and that human beings were all created by God.

And as a Christian I also believe that the accounts of creation we have in Genesis are poetic and not necessarily scientific.

God could have chosen science to explain creation ---- and in some ways --- many ways He is doing so in our time -- but in the book of Genesis the medium that God chose to employ is poetry.

Genesis 1 ---- among other things ----- is a passionately written poem ----- a poem with a point --- many points ----- one point it speaks against is the false gods that we as human beings have so often and so eagerly worshiped.

Genesis 1 insists right from the very beginning that there is only one God --- --- it opens --- “in the beginning God created...” --- not in the beginning the gods created --- but --- “in the beginning God created...”

Genesis 1 --- contrary to popular thought outside of Israel ----- insists that only one God exists.

Israel was surrounded by nations that believed in many gods --- gods of the stars ----- gods of the moons ---- gods of the birds --- and fish --- and clouds ----- and rain and weather --- and gods for this --- and gods for that ----- gods of this ---- and gods of that ----- without exception the nations surrounding Israel believed in many many gods.

What these nations assumed were creators --- and controllers ---- gods ---- Israel declared to simply be creations --- products of the one true living God.

And this was a huge distinction.

One God ---- monotheism ---- was unheard of --- the universe was too grand and large and wonderful and marvelous for there to just be one God ---- was the prevailing thought at that time.

And so God put it into the hearts of His people ---- to declare it otherwise.

We still brush up against this resistance to this today.

People still struggle with the reality of one true and living God --- Father --- Son ---- and Holy Spirit.

Genesis shows us that the God of Israel --- the creator of heaven and earth -- - and everything in between ---- is not like any of the other conceptions and

perceptions of what a god looks like or is ----- the God of creation stresses that He must be served --- and worshipped exclusively.

The God of Israel --- God the Father Son and Holy Spirit --- is unlike any other perception or understanding of divinity --- He is near and dear and He is with us --- and not distant and far off.

He is Emmanuel --- God with us in Jesus Christ.

He is near --- He knows us --- He is with us --- He dwells within us even ---- we are created in His image as our reading reminds us today ---- verses 26 and 27.

And He isn't with us one day and then abandoning us the next ---- as our passage from Matthew's gospel today says ----- "And surely I am with you always --- to the very end of the age."

God is not only with us but He is with us always and forever --- right to the very end.

Genesis sets the stage for the story of God ----- where God is in control and nothing is out of His control.

Genesis sets the stage right from the very beginning that God is with us and God is in us ---- as verse 27 says ---- "So God created mankind in his own image --- in the image of God he created them..."

One of the great questions of our day --- and every age is -----  
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There are so many different ideas about God --- even among Christians.

Look at our church ---- our national church --- at its annual meeting --- our General Assembly just last week ----- we were quickly reminded that there are some different ideas about God --- does He want us to bless same sex

marriages ---- or not ----- can gay people be ministers and elders --- and so on.

We are reminded again and again that there are many different ideas about God ---- that there are many different ideas about God among Christians --- and we were reminded that there are many different ideas about God in our very particular branch of Christianity --- Presbyterians in Canada.

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Whatever it is that God wants us to do and be He will make it clear --- in due time.

In the mean time we remain faithful ----- and pray --- and discern --- and follow His lead.

In the mean time we embrace God's gracious majesty and live as He so directs us to live.

No one person ---- no one church gets it all right ---- but we will work at figuring it out together in prayer and in reading scripture ----- and in grace and in love --- following God's lead.

Genesis reminds us that creation is beautiful --- that God is in control --- that it is good --- and the creation story also reminds us that we sometimes get it wrong --- we sometimes disobey and mess things up.

The story of God's love --- the Bible ---- makes it crystal clear that God loves us.

The story of God's love is that we will for sure get it wrong from time to time --- we will for sure mess things up from time to time --- and the story also drills it into our hearts that God loves us even when we mess up.

God loves us --- God loves us --- God loves us.

Even when we focus way too much on formulations about God and less on embracing and celebrating God's gracious majesty --- He still --- and always --- and forever ----- loves us.

The story of the Bible --- the reality of God is that He is with us ---- again and again and again --- forever and always.

The Bible reminds us that God is with us --- and that God loves us ---- and that nothing can ever change this eternal truth about the nature of God.

And the story of the Bible also reminds us that in light of our great and saving relationship with God ----- we have a role to play in His plan for creation.

And it isn't worship creation --- like the nations around Israel were so often doing --- with gods of the clouds and gods of the birds ---- and gods of the sea creatures and so on --- and it isn't worship creation in our time either --- "I get God when I'm hiking or golfing or fishing or whatever" --- perhaps --- --- but only partially.

It's worship God ---- it's embrace God's gracious majesty ----- and as the Biblical witness demonstrates over and over again --- it's worship God together ---- in community --- gathered together celebrating His saving love.

And when we embrace God's majesty we hear the voice of Christ saying things like He said in Matthew's gospel today ----

"Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you."

The grandeur of God --- to use Gerard Manley Hopkins' great phrase ----- -- the beauty and wonder of God --- that we see and experience in nature --- in community --- in prayer ---- in the scriptures --- in the faces of the ones we love ----- always ultimately draws us together in community.

And it not only draws us together but it compels us into action.

The world is not always friendly to the way of Christ.

But as Christians we are compelled to share Him regardless of the reception He gets.

God saw how His people were being enveloped into the pagan ways of surrounding peoples and nations --- and did not abandon them.

Instead time and time again --- He revealed to His people more and more about His saving loving nature --- going back to the very foundations of His creation --- as we see in Genesis 1 today.

And time and time again after this as the Israelites were encroached upon --- - God revealed to them what they needed to know and do ---- in order to remain faithful and true to the will of God.

So it is for us --- with God's Word --- the scriptures ----- as well as God's living Word ----- the Risen Christ.

It's a profound mistake to think that God has stopped creating and making new.

“By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work.” ----- Genesis 2:2 ---- in no way suggests that God is done with the act of creating outright.

All it says there is that He was finished from --- “the work he had been doing” ----- He was finished with that work --- that job --- that particular creation ---- not all work ---- or all jobs or all creating acts ---- but that work --- and that creation --- the world as we know it was finished --- but that isn't synonymous with God not creating anything after that.

Genesis 1 and 2 remind us that God initiated creative acts amidst a state of chaos.

And God still initiates creative acts amidst a state of chaos.

A child born ---- is a great and profound creative act of God.

A heart transformed by forgiveness after years of anger or frustration or guilt or all of these --- is a profound example of God's creating action.

A reconciled relationship ---- is a powerful example of the creative work of God still active and alive today.

To think of God creating as limited to a one time event --- is hugely mistaken and limiting of God's powers and prerogatives.

I love the way Paul puts it in 2 Corinthians 15:17 ----- "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" - ----- in other words anytime Christ takes root in a life --- there is a new creation.

We stand in the beauty and wonder of creation --- not as an isolated act done --- or a deed complete.

Instead we stand in the beauty and wonder of creation as a reminder of the creator --- who is still creating --- who is still making things new --- who is still with us.

Who will always be with us.

God's story as revealed to us in the Word begins with God creating and ends with God creating ---- Christ --- creating things new through the great and saving act of the cross.

God isn't finished creating yet.

Yes ---- as He said ---- He was done with our world --- our planet --- at least for then --- perhaps he'll change His mind --- but that does not in any mean He is done from creating period.

He is still creating --- and re-creating --- making things new --- changing things as He sees fit.

That is precisely why we refer to Him as a living and true God.

Living --- creating ---- re-creating.

Transforming ---- reconciling --- redeeming.

And of course saving.

When we say God is with us --- we are referring to far more than just being with us in strictly human terms.

When we say God is with us we also mean He is with us from the very beginning --- before we ever existed --- to the very end ---- far beyond what we are capable of even imagining.

In fact a better way to put it is to say we are with God.

We are with He who is far greater than we.

He is the centre and we are the satellites.

In a certain sense here on earth we are the centre --- He made that pretty clear in Genesis --- everything is under our dominion.

But we are not the true centre ---- we are satellites that revolve around Him in the bigger picture.

Just as the breeze surrounds us ---- just as the sun shining surrounds us --- so it is with God.

And just as we cannot stop or control the breeze or the sunshine --- so we cannot control just how and when and why God chooses to work on us and with us and in us.

And the beauty of this is --- the weight is off our shoulders.

Yes we have something to do with --- and for --- and in Him.

But it comes from Him and isn't self generated.

He is with us --- and just as He created in the beginning so He is still creating --- above and around --- beyond --- and also within us.

It's a wonderful mystery to embrace --- God having created --- and God still creating.

God having done as He pleased --- and God still doing as He pleases.

God with us --- is the great anxiety reducer and stress reliever.

Just as God created in the beginning --- made something beautiful ---- so He still does.

God makes beautiful new things each and every day.

Things ---- people --- animals --- plants and so on.

And --- God makes situations ----- circumstances --- and realities new each and every day as well.

To see a situation suddenly change for the better is as powerful and beautiful as a flower bursting open.

To see someone change --- a heart softened or opened ---- can be just as beautiful as holding anew born.

God is with us ---- means anything is possible.

God is with us means don't ever give up.

God is with us means don't ever be consumed by despair.

God is with us means until the end of the age ---- forever as we know it.

God is with us ---- and nothing can change this.

And ---

God is with us and nothing means more.

As we will soon join in praise ---- How great thou art.

Indeed how great thou art --- the one and only true and living God and Father of all.

Amen.