

I. Loss is Loss

In the beginning- to the end of the age... Genesis 1 to the last word of the Gospel of Matthew. That's quite a span. That's the whole story. Beginning to end, and an end which is our beginning. And here we are, poised on the threshold of an end which is also a beginning. It is our day, Trinity Sunday. Today was to have been the day we celebrated everything all at once: Trinity, the ministry of our Rector, Sam Lloyd, and the conclusion of the How Firm a Foundation Campaign.

It was supposed to feel one way, and it doesn't feel that way.

We will be celebrating Sam and the campaign next week. But because Sam is battling illness, because the country is in turmoil, I don't know why else- this finale is both a victory and something more complicated.

That puts us into "the glorious company of the apostles" as they are gathered with Jesus today for his final word. The gospel today is a story of triumph: It is a resurrection appearance on a mountaintop. And the gospel today is also a story of grief and loss. Jesus is with his re-gathered followers, they see him, and they know both that he has destroyed death, and that he is still leaving. The suddenness of his death on the cross is one hot moment of distress, but today exposes that the slow realization that the beloved is really going, is really gone, is the aching, non-linear work and process of grief. "They honored him, they worshipped him, but some

doubted, some hesitated.” It was supposed to feel one way, and it doesn’t feel that way.

Jesus doesn’t want them to be gloomy: he gives them a reprise pep talk of the mission, trying to point them forward. Go, baptize, teach, remember!

But when you’re losing your leader, your teacher, your friend, your co-worker, nobody wants a #@ \$ pep talk. We get it, he’s going. We get it, he’s going to a better place, he has done his work. We get it, we are the ones who have to build the kingdom.

But loss is loss.

The disciples knew and loved Jesus, they believed he was the messiah: and- they thought it would feel one way, and it doesn’t feel that way.

What should success look like? They hoped maybe, Jesus’ victory would look good and sure and clear. Instead, it is colored with sadness and uncertainty. They are left, alone and vulnerable, charged with the mission of being and building the church without the cover of their leader.

“Remember, I am with you, to the end of the age.” Jesus says. But, to the end of the age isn’t right now. It isn’t tomorrow.

Loss is loss.

So then, what now? What now can we see? What can even our grief teach us?

I believe the invitation is this: Let's start again.

Go back to the beginning.

All the way back. Tell the whole story again.

Let us take ourselves up and our and beyond our selves, this mountain, this moment, and into the very spaciousness of the deep poetry of our tradition.

II. Beginning, Again

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth...

God speaks words of power which shape our world as we know it. And it is good, it is good, it is very good. From all the way out here in the stratosphere, the movement of time itself, the baseline rhythm of night and day is a holy, blessed and hallowed pattern. Freed from the small and concrete awareness of loss always unfolding, from Genesis One we are reminded that the deepest story is an unbroken conversation in time and place of God with us, God's creation. An endless movement of formlessness into form and by day 7, of form back to the formlessness of holy rest.

In the beginning, our beginning, our beginning again, the supreme fact is God the Creator. Before we need to know or do anything else, we need to know

that there is such a One: the Creator. This world is our home and God has given us the gift of belonging to it and to God. We live here, and we are images of the One who made it.

Before anything else, God is the Source, the author, the mother and father.

Before anything else happens, we are always, at the beginning, blessed and delighted in. We can trust the pattern of time and space that begins to unfold here. We can take a deep breath, whatever comes, and know that in this story, we will find rest, assurance, and surety. This is the promise Jesus wishes to recall to us: I am with you always, to the end.

Hallow the beginning.

Hallow the end.

Hallow the beginning which comes from the end.

There's just that little problem of EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN THE
BEGINNING AND THE END.

The beginning is spacious, eternal, but it doesn't last long.

The ending is a victory, but sort of a sad one, and over before we even knew what we had. So what now?

III. Acknowledge

Let's turn to another rich text we have before us today: the text of the Te Deum. A festival canticle to be sung on a feast day such as this, its text is a perfect way to begin again. Found in the back of your bulletin, this piece of liturgical prose dates back to the 4th century. We will be given the chance, shortly, to attentively listen to its music, to bask in the grand room it opens up for us.

If one life-giving way forward through the grief of losing a leader is to retell the whole story, re-set the whole frame, well, then, this canticle is what the doctor ordered.

It's literally, the whole story.

It too begins with Genesis 1: We praise and acknowledge, with the whole earth, God, the Father everlasting. The first thing to say is that God is the Creator!

Acknowledge is a nice word, too, meaning: to recognize the rights, authority, or status of, and also to affirm knowledge of or agreement with, AND, to express gratitude for, to take notice of. We see you, God, is the general idea. From that original loft, we pivot:

The Cherubim and Seraphim are named, singing their eternal Sanctus, and that, friends, pulls us all the way from the heavens into this church, into the Temple! Where Isaiah heard this song, and the glory of God filled the temple to the point of shaking the very pillars (maybe the organ postlude? ☺)

And notice the text has changed from the heavens and the powers; it has become heaven and earth who speak. The incarnation is here! Heaven and earth sing together!

Then the list of rockstars, the hall of fame- the glorious company of the apostles, the goodly fellowship of the prophets, the noble army of martyrs- I feel a procession in these words, don't you? And then it includes us too: the holy church throughout the world.

From the powers of heaven to you and me. Down one level further. The Sanctus brought us into the building, but now the procession brings the majesty right down to you and me.

And the landing for this huge descending sweep is none other than the most holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

And here we must pause for a moment to celebrate the audacity and power of liturgical language. Liturgical language dares to stand in the very pattern of Genesis one, whereby a holy word spoken calls something into being. By

believing in speaking which creates we conform to God's own lifelong pattern. Formless is spoken into form and rests again, not owned by form. So in liturgical language we speak and sing of heaven and earth come down among us, and it is so. We invoke the name of God as Trinity, and behold: it is very good.

Other kinds of language may tangle with the ideas spoken, but liturgical language performs what it speaks: it makes as it names, as it names, it is made.

And on we go- the next room into which we are ushered by the Te Deum is the narrative of the Incarnation: Jesus born of Mary, dies on the cross to overcome the sharpness of death- can we just taste that phrase for a moment? to overcome the sharpness of death... to take the loss which characterizes our human lives and blunt its force- to free us from despair at the rule of death- oh what a gift! Oh sweet Jesus, who in this humble way achieved a victory that didn't quite feel like we thought it would, but who, in this humble act opens the kingdom for us.

And still, even here, Jesus does leave. He opens the kingdom for us, and then he goes back to Genesis, back to the place where he is pure Trinity, where he "sitteth at the right hand of God, in the glory of that Creator/ Source/ Father." His return to that place is how we know his way rules, his way of love through suffering *is* the real heavenly power, the real authority. He has to leave and go to that place for it all to work, for it all to make sense, for the poetry to hold.

But loss is still loss; the triumph doesn't quite feel like we thought it would.

You will perhaps notice, when the choir sings the Esenvalds' setting, that the emotional heart of the piece is this very line. Because in this line, our loss is acknowledged. The victory is acknowledged, and in that victory is also sadness.

As the piece comes to its conclusion, we are taken back out of the heart of the height of the holy love and loss, and invited to re-group. The percussion accompanies the final petitions, suggesting a rhythm of daily use. Help us. Help us know how to take our place in this song. Help us live, well, in the music and poetry of your redeeming and sustaining and creating love. Help us see every ending as the face of the deep, the place from which it all, always begins again. Help us hear, again, now, the words of the Gospel. Jesus tells us to remember, and here we are, gathered to do just that. And he tells us to go, to baptize, to teach. Let us recommit to do just that. He is gone, and he is with us always to the end of the age, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.