

The Reverend Patricia Phaneuf Alexander
Trinity Sunday (A) – 31 May 2026
St. Dunstan's, Bethesda
Genesis 1:1—2:4a
Matthew 28:16-20

*In the beginning, O God,
You shaped our souls and set their patterns
You formed our bodies
and gave them breath.
Renew us this day
in the image of Your love.
O great God, grant us Your light.
O great God, grant us Your grace.
O great God, grant us Your joy this day, **Amen.**¹*

I am blessed with a large extended family. I do not have any sisters or brothers, but I do have the next best thing: cousins. There are 16 of us on my father's side of the family, and while we don't get to see each other in person much anymore – the occasional milestone birthday, or wedding, or funeral – when we were little, we were together *all* the time. I miss those days; social media is a poor substitute.

My grandparents' house was the hub of our family social world, especially in the summer, when on any given afternoon there was sure to be some subset of Phaneuf cousins in the pool. We all learned to swim there, and we spent hours racing each other in pickup swim meets, or playing "Marco Polo," or – my favorite – making human whirlpools.

Do you know what I'm talking about? It's when a group walks or runs around and around the pool, all going in the same direction, gradually building momentum until eventually the current is strong enough to carry everyone

¹Adapted from J. Philip Newell, *Celtic Prayers from Iona* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997),

along. It's a bit like a lazy river. What I loved about making a whirlpool with my cousins was that it was impossible to sit out: If you were in the water, you were swept up in the flow. And even if you were out of the water, on the edge, more often than not someone would grab your hand and pull you in.

We were all in it together – a whole pod of us, splashing and squealing our way around the pool.

We were a community, and there was a whole lot of love swirling in that water.

It's a wonderful memory.

This is the image that kept coming to mind, over and over, this week as I prayed about the feast we're celebrating this morning. Trinity Sunday is notoriously unpopular with preachers, because the assignment seems to be to try to "explain" how the Trinity works. What does it mean that God is Father, Son, *and* Holy Spirit – all at the same time?

Now, at some point it's worth taking the time to learn how theologians over the centuries have wrestled with the Trinity. It is important that, as educated Christians, we understand something about this doctrine that is so central to our faith. But I think you'll be happy to know that isn't our task today.

Instead, I'd like us just to picture those happy children on a hot summer day long ago, churning up the water, generating energy, pulling – inviting – others in.

Imagine God like *that*.

Imagine God as a *community* of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, bound together in a relationship of mutual love. Overflowing, abundant love – love that cannot be contained. Love that is always creating more – more than enough...and then some.

Imagine God like *that*. A God Who invites us, you and me, into the swirling water, to “join the pool party,” as it were.

This morning we heard the first of two Creation accounts from the Book of Genesis, the book of beginnings. It is beautiful imagery, the attempt of a broken and hurting people to express, in poetry and metaphor, the ordered and careful work of a creative and *creating* God Who lovingly fashions all that is – including humans in God’s own image.

A bit of background may be helpful here: Scholars think that Genesis 1 was written during the period of exile in Babylon (present-day Iraq) in the sixth century BCE. You may remember that the people of Jerusalem and Judea had lost *everything* – their land, their homes, their place of worship, and in some cases their loved ones – and now were in captivity in a foreign land. This became one of *the* defining events in Jewish history.

We can well imagine how they felt forgotten and abandoned by God – the God Who they believed had chosen them, the God with Whom they were in relationship. It was devastating. And so it is believed that an anonymous priest took material that had been circulating orally for generations and crafted it as a narrative of God’s abiding love and care for God’s people since the very beginning – love and care not diminished by exile.

This story was written specifically to offer hope in a time of desolation and despair.²

Hold onto that.

And more than two millennia later, we continue to tell this story. Our children know it; it is part of our collective imagination. It continues to shape our understanding of God.

² With thanks to the Rev. Dr. David Smith for this helpful summary (<https://stthomasmcleanva.org/blog/genesis-1-12-a-map-for-exiles-week-1>)

Picture the Spirit of God – “God’s wind,” *ruach*, in Hebrew – swirling over the waters.

Building momentum.

Generating energy.

Creating.

Now hear the Voice, speaking into the nothingness: *Let there be light*.

We know those words. They are familiar.

But what you may *not* know, and what I only learned recently, is that in Hebrew “Let there be” is not a command.

It’s an *invitation*.

Not to be a grammar nerd, but this is important: The verb “Let there be...” is a conditional form, and it is open-ended. God is calling forth the light, summoning the good in Creation.³ There is a sense of on-going-ness, as God sets creativity in motion.

It is generative.

Light begets light.

Life begets life.

Later, when God says, “Let us make,” the Hebrew word for God is plural – *Elohim*. It is a community, and it is relational; think about that whirlpool. And the verb is collaborative: It implies *participation* – both within the Godhead *and* with the human beings that God is making.

³ The Rev. Dr. David Brown, Class Lecture, “Strategy: Forming and Implementing Vision,” Duke Divinity School, May 18, 2026.

From the very beginning, according to Genesis 1, we were meant to be *co-creators* with God, invited into the swirling waters of Creation, participating in something new being born.

Ponder that.

We hear this call affirmed in this morning's Gospel, the very end of Matthew, in a passage known as "The Great Commission." It is after Easter, and the Risen Christ meets His disciples back where it all began for them, in Galilee, where they were first called to follow Him.

Jesus "pulls them into the pool," so to speak. Jesus says, in effect, *We have been on the move for these past three years. We have generated energy – together. The current is moving, and the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand! So GO! Carry on! Keep the momentum going!*

And I'm there in the water with you.

That's the "co" part of "commission": Jesus is right alongside them – as He is right alongside *us*.

Friends, what makes Christianity a living faith is that the creating work of God, the ministry of Jesus, and the invigorating power of the Holy Spirit never stop. It continues, generation after generation after generation, pulling more and more people into the water.

And you and I, even now, are invited to participate.

Later in this service we will commission the members of this year's Sacred Ground Circle, who have spent the past several months learning and praying together about how to become Beloved Community, striving for racial healing,

reconciliation, and God's justice in our broken country and world.⁴ Listen carefully to the vows they will make – with God's help. Because the work that God has begun here at St. Dunstan's isn't over. It has only begun.

The current is moving.

It is generative.

Light begets light.

Life begets life.

Will you jump into the water?

In the Name of the One, Holy, and Undivided Trinity, Amen.

⁴ <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sacred-ground/>