

The Triune God Creates from Nothing

June 11, 2017 | Trinity Sunday

You believe in God, but are you in awe of Him? Swedish poet E. Gustav Johnson certainly was one day as he walked back from his church. He watched as a storm rolled in from the sea—strong winds, powerful flashes of lightning and claps of thunder; He saw the sheer awesome power of God displayed in nature... The storm subsided almost as suddenly as it came. As the dark clouds rolled away, the sun burst through the darkness and a rainbow stretched across the sky... awestruck, he penned the words that would later become the hymn “How Great Thou Art.” People will often tell me that they feel the closest to God when they are in creation; and it is a wonderful reminder for us to see God’s creation. Today, the Holy Bible takes us to the very beginning to the moment God’s awesome power tore through the darkness to create life and light. We see the Triune God creates from nothing.

Genesis 1:1-5, 26-2:3

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. 3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” 27 So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” 29 Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so. 31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

We love to create. Our creations mean a lot to us. Maybe you have the little craft project from your kids or grandkids hanging at home on the refrigerator—its special to you, because they made it; it has their fingerprints on it. You might feel that way about some of our own craft projects at home—it could be that sewing project, your scrap book, or even that perfect dessert. For the guys here, maybe you just itch to make things with your hands: build furniture out of wood, planting a garden, or make a prize worthy rack of ribs on the grill. Mankind, we are told, was made in the image of God—perhaps a small part of that image is that just as God created, we too have an innate desire to create.

But any comparison between our work and God’s work falls short when we look at the first chapter of Genesis. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” The Hebrew language attempts in some small way to capture the sheer awesome creative power of God with the word בָּרָא (*bara*). In the Hebrew mind, people make things all the time, but we can

only borrow from what is given to us; we need ingredients to bake a cake. Only God creates. *Bara* is a word that uniquely describes God's power because only God can create from *nothing*. Our minds have a hard time picturing nothing—before God's first act of creation not even empty space existed! It is only after God creates that such abstractions as "formless," "empty," "darkness," and "deep" suddenly have meaning. The Triune God truly creates from nothing.

Often times, when it comes to creation, we only attribute the work of creation to the Father. However, it is clear from this creation account that all three persons of the Trinity participate together for creation. The Father orchestrates His creation, and upon seeing the dark, empty formlessness of the earth He decisively intervenes when He speaks, "Let there be light." But when the Father speaks, He does not just speak empty words, but a Living Active Word—the 2nd person of Trinity, Jesus Christ. The Apostle John describes Jesus as the Word: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:1,3-4). And the Holy Spirit? As if anticipating His creative work through water, the Holy Spirit is found "hovering over the face of the waters."

Together, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit work flawlessly to create the universe—everything in the heavens and the earth—in six natural days, as the Lord records: "There was evening there was morning the first day." The Hebrew carefully defines each day of creation with the phrase "there was evening and morning." Each day is the same period of light and darkness that defines our day. There is no room for eons between each day, the Bible does allow for millions of years for evolution to take place, but simply rests all of creation in the almighty hands of God.

Now whereas we may be very quick to rush to the defense of a six day creation, and defend God's honor as the creator, we can often do so with very little awe of God in our hearts. We believe in, defend, and teach a six day creation, but then we are so quick to turn away from our creator to worship our own "creations." No we do not have idols of wood or stone that we bow down and worship, we don't worship the cake in the oven or the ribs on the grill. Instead, we spend six days of our week worshiping abstract creations—things we cannot necessarily see or touch, but we do *feel* them. We worship the creation of a dream. Perhaps its the image of a perfect family portrait—the dream that we can capture a sense of security. We can create and capture this feeling of security; and maybe we don't rest our security in our car or house, perhaps we just want enough to get by—we want the security of knowing we have so much "cushion in the bank account" so that my family can live the way we want. We worship the creation of our future; if its not security in the moment its security for when we retire, or security for our children—we want to create a better life for them than what we had ourselves. Is it wrong to want good things for ourselves or our family? Not at all, but when we live six days of the week giving our awe and worship to the things we can create, we are committing the sin of idolatry. We are telling ourselves, "I can create from nothing."

Like Adam and Eve, we are created in the image of God—the finger prints of the Creator are on our hearts—we are meant for a relationship of love and perfect trust that can only be

filled by the Triune God. When we worship our creations, we not only rob God of the worship and awe that is due Him, but we rob our selves of the peace and real security God means us to find in a relationship with Him. So often, the bitterness, envy, anger, and frustration I feel in life is because I am trying to play creator. My heart, our hearts, need to be daily recaptured by the Triune God, to rest in Him.

We rest knowing that the Triune God created everything from nothing. God takes the nothing I am and forms me into His image. And so from the very beginning, not only of time but Salvation History, God acted for us. The Father saw the darkness and the unshaped chaos of our lives of hopeless sin—condemned to eternal darkness—and He acted. He spoke to His beloved Son, sending Jesus the “Word made flesh” who “made His dwelling among us.” Jesus penetrated through the darkness of a world lost in sin and brought the light of salvation. God so loved us, so loved His creation—the craft projects hanging on the refrigerator, that He would become one of us, to hang and die on a cross. The creator dies for His creation. Not to awe us with His power, but to fill our hearts with the awe of His limitless love for us. And the Holy Spirit, uses His favorite creative medium to give us a second birth: water. The Holy Spirit uses water and the Word in the Sacrament of Baptism to forgive our sins, to wash away the old sinful nature, and reshape us in the image of Christ. “You are God’s workmanship created in Christ to do good works...” Created to live in the image of God, and worship God our creator. God says to us, “I am your God.” This means that not one day, not six days, but seven days a week you find rest in the security that all of God’s power and all of God’s love come together in Jesus Christ to work all things for your good.

“How Great Thou Art” is a hymn of praise that stands in awe of all God’s creative works. The hymn was not completed until almost fifty years after its original composition when Stuart Hine added the verse, “And when I think, that God His Son not sparing, sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in, that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, He bled and died to take away my sin. Then sings my soul my Savior God to thee, how great thou art, how great thou art, then sings my soul, my savior God to Thee, how great thou art, how great thou art.” Amen.