

**“Creatively Dividing”
(Genesis 1:1-2:4)**

June 4, 2023
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The Unity of Pentecost

Last week, on Pentecost, we highlighted the most important gift of the Holy Spirit that rains down upon us, the gift of unity. When the Holy Spirit enters us, it makes it possible for us to understand each other in a deeper way, that goes beyond language. The Holy Spirit joins us together into one body; the “Body of Christ.” And as part of the one Body, we become servants of something greater than ourselves, something good.

Creative Division

Today, our first reading is the Creation Story. And interestingly, God is also doing something good here. But God appears to be doing it in the opposite way, by dividing things up; separating one thing from another splitting and creating opposites; day from night, land from sky and water, a diversity of creatures and plants and male from female. And we are to know that it is a good kind of division, because at the end of each day, God feels that the result is “very good.”

And this conclusion i.e. that it is “very good” is important for us today, because I think our tendency in these complicated times, is to think that

dividing one thing into two new things is something that inevitably leads to results that are very bad. What good is there in being a nation that divides itself from all being Americans into being Democrats or Republicans. Countrymen vs foreigners, rural vs urban, black vs white, gay vs straight, parent vs child and all the other things we divide ourselves into? Every day we see new divisions that result in new conflicts. And in today's pessimistic climate, we tend to say to ourselves, "This is very bad."

I'm sure that is how a lot of people are feeling today. The feeling is that greater unity needs to be established through uniformity; through some kind of return to a greater sameness. And many believe that this can only happen if we put our future in the hands of a strong man leader who can use his power to enforce it. The democratic process, where everyone has to compromise and come to a shared agreement often seems too slow and messy and too willing to cater to minority voices to be able to bring us together.

So I think it is an important fact that, at the beginning of the Bible, God takes great delight in taking one thing and splitting it apart from another, over and over again, creating new wonders to experience.

Blessed Diversity

Before I became a minister, I used to sit further back in the pews. I did it because I enjoyed seeing the heads of the people sitting in front of me. The wavy hair with playful curls, the long straight hair. The frizzy hair. The perms. The bald patches. The colors from, red, golden, shiny black, brown, salt and pepper. And not just the hair and head but also the posture and mannerisms.

I liked the way it led me imagine each person, and to feel each person in a different way. I remember how it felt, when I was a child in the pews, soaking up new feelings from the people sitting around me. And I realize now that “it was very good”.

I much prefer to sit in a crowd in this country than say in Japan, where my dad came from, partly because being in an audience in Japan feels so homogeneous by comparison. Everyone has straight black hair and everyone seems to behave predictably. There is a well-know phrase the Japanese have for themselves, that the “nail that sticks out gets hammered back in.” I love Japan, it is a great country and the people are amazing. But to me sameness is boring.

Show me a congregation that is all made up of “progressives”, with all heads nodding in agreement or a congregation where everyone is conservative and in agreement, and I say, “No thanks.” I’d rather have some uncertainty and be respectfully disagreed with here and there, because then I can feel like I’m growing and experiencing something new.

We are not a congregation made up of all “progressives” or all “conservatives” and I’m sure those congregations do a lot of important things. We are not all the same here. And to my mind, that is very good.

The Splitting off of Our Offspring

I think that a good example of splitting something in two to create something good, happens when parents raise children. There are those early years when the child and the parents exist as a kind of unity. But sooner than most parent would like, God puts the impulse within each child to begin becoming his or her own person.

It’s not always an easy transition. I have never thought of myself as a controlling person, but there was a time when my growing son thought of me as a completely unreasonable parent and the more I tried to be reasonable, the more unreasonable he seemed to me.

It became clear to me that where once he had been my 'mini-me,' and happy to let me call the shots, now he had completely different interests. It seemed as though anything I wanted for him was, by definition, not what he wanted for himself. So I finally had to realize that it would be better to support him in finding his own direction, than to continue hoping that he would have a conversion and be what I wanted him to be. At the time, I looked at this separation and it felt to me that 'this was very bad.'

Now, of course, I can see that he has grown up to live a life that is all his own. And I see that the split between us was necessary and that God was doing something that was very good. I wouldn't have wanted him to live his life worrying about whether he was living up to his father's hopes. He does things very differently, and I enjoy learning from the way he handles things for himself. I had to let him go, so he could find himself and we could refind each other.

So it seems that while God provides us with the gift of unity through the Holy Spirit. God also does good creative work by splitting things apart and creating something new out of what has been divided. Yes, there is pain for us and loss, when something we held as unity is split apart.

And it seems to me that, if we see every new division and every new separation in a negative way, as a new source of conflict, then our situation will look more bleak each day. But if we are willing to trust in God's ability to create something new and good, then it is very likely that God will do just that. And if we believe trust in God's power to do this, it will make our lives a lot less stressful and our country a lot more resilient.