

**Texts: Genesis 1:1-2:4a; Psalm 8; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20**

**Beginning, middle, end. That's how stories are constructed, right? A well-constructed plot has a beginning, a middle and an end. This morning's readings give us the chance to think about beginnings and middles and endings, because the first reading begins at the beginning of Genesis and our Gospel comes from the very end of Matthew.**

**Beginning, middle, end. Let us begin where the Bible begins, the first chapter of Genesis. In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth. The book of Genesis is not history as historians think of history, and it is not science as scientists think of science. These first words of Genesis are poetry. These words are hymn, and praise, and saga. They do not contradict what we have learned about the origins of our planet and the origins of life. We are able to hold the truth of these words alongside the discoveries of geology and astronomy and evolution.**

**These words, the beginning of the story, take us deeper than science and history do. They invite us to acknowledge who we truly are and where we truly come from. Here is the beginning of the story – an affirmation of God's good world, and the reality of where we human beings belong in it.**

**We come from a God who sees. At each step of the way, God stops to reflect on his handiwork. God pauses to take in all that is taking shape. God is not in a hurry. God lingers over creation. God observes and notices. God pays attention to every leaf and wing and boulder and child.**

**We come from a God who speaks. God declares that what God has created is good. This first chapter of Genesis brims over with goodness and blessing. God's intention for creation is for goodness, rather than evil, to be the default setting. What would it be like to**

**live without fear, without corruption, without greed? What would it be like to live by blessing our fellow creatures, rather than seeing how much we can get away with?**

**We come from a God who makes new things. God spent six days calling forth beautiful things, beautiful creatures that didn't exist before. And the work continues. Every morning we wake up to something new – a new day, new life, new wonders, new beginnings.**

**We come from the likeness of God. We come from the image of God. We have been given sight and speech, consciousness and creativity. God's mark is part of your very being: God's joy, Gods' intentions, God's beauty and God's love.**

**That is the beginning of the story. Take a look at the Bible. You can see that in between the very first page of Genesis and the gospel from the book of Matthew, there are pages and pages that continue to tell the story. The middle of the book has many strands and threads. It tells the story of God's people, called and chosen by God to do God's work and to reflect God's glory. It tells the story of God calling to individuals, like Noah, Abraham, Sarah, and Moses. Gideon, Deborah and Samson. Saul, David, and Solomon. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel. It tells the story of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants. It tells the story of Joseph and his brothers, David and his brothers. It tells the story of Moses confronting Pharaoh and leading the people of Israel from slavery to freedom. There is violence in this book – war and conflict, conquest and domination, rape and slaughter. There are stories about how human beings turn away so very often from God and set off in their own directions.**

**The middle of this book contains the laws that God gave to the people of Israel to govern them. It is filled with stories from their history, stories of judges and prophets,**

kings and holy men and women. Regular people who heard God's call and followed God's lead. The middle of the book is filled with psalms, hymns of praise and sometimes lament, poetry and proverbs. This book tells the stories of the prophets, the warnings about what will happen when people turn from God to worship the idols they themselves create. This book tells the story of the exile, of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. And then it tells of the return to the land of promise, about rebuilding and restoration. It tells of the longing for a king, a Messiah, a descendant of the great king David, who would restore the monarchy and throw off the yoke of all foreign rulers. This book tells of God's relentless pursuit of God's people, of God's never-ending love and mercy.

And then we come to the story of Jesus as Matthew tells it. You know this story well. Matthew begins his story by telling us how Jesus fits into the story of Israel, beginning with Abraham, and continuing through King David, and the exile to Babylon. Jesus, born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, son of God and son of Man. Jesus who preached and taught, who healed and cast out demons, who ate meals with all kinds of people, who spoke peace and taught peace and lived peace.

Jesus, who so infuriated the religious leaders that they colluded with the Roman occupiers to get rid of him. Betrayal, torture, death by crucifixion. Everyone around him thought that was the end of the story. But three days later, when the women came to the tomb, they found it was empty and Jesus himself spoke to them. And then he appeared to all his disciples over the course of 40 days. And finally we come to today's gospel reading, the very end of the gospel of Matthew --- Jesus sending eleven people out to all the nations, to make disciples, and to baptize and to teach.

Beginning, middle, end, right? Wrong.

**The Christian story is this: End, beginning, middle.**

**The Christian story begins with the end: Christ has died. Jesus' death on a Roman cross made it clear that God will go to any length to enter into our human story. Jesus' life and death prove that God loves this world, this creation so much that God was willing to become human, live a human life, die a human death. Jesus' death seemed like the end of that experiment. Each one of us will face death. But it turns out that death is not the end at all.**

**Christ is risen. Jesus rose from death and life begins in a new way. It is the beginning of an entirely new way of living. Life in Christ means being born again. Life in Christ means turning from the old path and walking in a new direction. Life in Christ means freedom from the power of death, freedom to live.**

**Christ has died -- The end. Christ is risen -- The beginning. And now the middle of the story: Christ will come again. There is more, so much more to come. We live in the middle of the story. We have a perspective that stretches from this very moment all the back to the first moment of creation and all the way forward to the moment when we will see God face to face. Jesus' words at the end of Matthew are spoken to the eleven remaining disciples. But they are addressed to everyone who reads them or hears them. Go. Make disciples. Baptize. Teach. All of these action verbs. All of these deeds that Jesus himself is calling for us to do. We who are Jesus' followers, we live in the middle of the story.**

**And we have Jesus' promise. Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. It is the same promise that the angel spoke to Joseph in a dream at the beginning of Matthew's story: "This child will fulfill the promise of the prophet Isaiah: Behold a young**

**woman will conceive and bear a son and he shall be called Emanuel, God-with-us.” Here Jesus repeats it: I am with you. Immanuel. God-with-us.**

**End. Beginning. Middle.**

**On this Trinity Sunday we acknowledge that every person is a part of God’s story. Created by God. Blessed by God. Loved by God. In your baptism, you were washed with water created by God the Father. You were marked with the cross of God the Son. You were sealed with the breath of God the Holy Spirit. You became God’s own beloved child. You have been given the power to speak, the power to serve, the power to teach. You have been given the power to tell God’s story to everyone you meet.**

**End. Beginning. Middle. The story is not over. Go and take your place in it.**

**Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**