

## **What's God Got to Do With It?**

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Community Presbyterian Church - Rochester, Minnesota

Trinity Sunday - June 4, 2023

Texts: Psalm 8, Matthew 28:16-20, 2 Corinthians 13:9-13

### **Psalm 8 (adapted)**

Eternal Love, our Sovereign and Savior,

**how majestic is your name in all the earth!**

Your glory glows in the heavens;

It is babbled by infants and sung by children.

**Enemies have no place in your realm;**

**Avengers and nay-sayers are silenced.**

When I look at your heavens, the work of your hands,

the moon and the stars that you set in place, I wonder;

**Where do human beings fit in your pattern?**

**Who are we, that you should care for us?**

Yet you have made us only a little lower than yourself,

and crowned us with glory and honor.

You have shared with us responsibility for all living things:

**Sheep and cattle, wild things, birds and fish,**

**the beasts of the field, the birds of the air,**

**and everything that lives in the sea.**

Eternal Love, our Sovereign and Savior

**how majestic is your name in all the earth!**

### **Matthew 28:16-20**

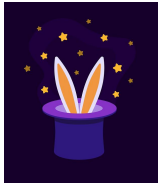
Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them,

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Let the mystery be.

Early in my preaching career I promised myself I would never insult people by using big words from seminary that made me feel smart and the rest of you—left out, at best. If I take my car to the mechanic, am I looking for a lecture on catalytic conversion? Just fix it, sir, and let the mystery be. The one annual exception is Trinity Sunday (today) when pastors around the world labor to explain the inexplicable. The word is *perichoresis*. It's not so much what Trinity is but what they do. In Greek, it literally means “dancing around.” OK, you can forget the word now, but remember the action.

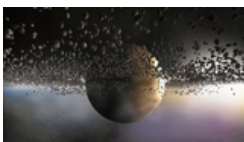


To make the point, I have prepared a simple magic trick. Watch carefully: Abracadabra, hocus pocus [tap the top hat, pull out the rabbit]. Sweet little fuzzy bunny! Cute, cuddly; dry your tears on its soft pink fur. But wait. Here's the real magician, Jane, and her pal Nessy. [Live pet rabbit.] What's the difference? One's alive. One's not. One will eat and grow and make more bunnies.... The other will always be just one bunny. Pinky is predictable. Nessy may surprise you! Pinky will be there until you outgrow it. You will probably outlive Nessy. Is it the bunny that makes you sad when it dies? No, it's your love.



God is not a bunny of any sort. But are you interested in settling for a comforting, unchanging God? Or would you prefer a living God who dances and surprises you? Here's the good news: God is not a thing! God is not static! God is a verb, an action. Creating! Dancing! Dying! Rising! And always speaking. Always always always speaking love, whose name in public, don't forget, is justice.<sup>1</sup> Love at home may be comfort and peace. Love in the world is liberation—not without trouble. Not without work, and words, and maybe a little chaos.

Is this too abstract? Go back to Jane's bunny, Nessy. Say I bring my dog in, too. Her name is April, but I call her Eight Ball. Guess why? Just for fun, let's let Nessy and Eight Ball loose together. What do you expect will happen? Chaos, perhaps? Save the bunny! Seize the dog! It's not their fault, it's their nature. Sometimes people run wild, too. It's our nature. What's God got to do with it? Well, as Mary Oliver said, “If God exists, he isn't just butter and good luck—he isn't just the summer day the red rose, he's the snake he's the mouse [the bunny the dog] the hole in the ground, for which thoroughness, if anything, I would adore him.”<sup>2</sup>



The stuffed bunny may comfort your inner child, but does it invite adoration? (For that matter, neither do Nessy or April.) I imagine God's dance in three steps: chaos, order, and ecstasy. Genesis 1. In the beginning was chaos. Or the big bang. Whatever. Nothing was connected up properly. So God put things in order. Sky up there, land down here, sea over there, plants here, animals over

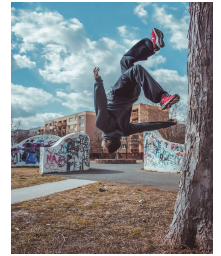
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<sup>1</sup> Cornel West

<sup>2</sup> Mary Oliver, *The Leaf and the Cloud*, p. 50.

there. And God said, “Let *us* create humans in *our* image.” (Note the plural pronouns.) All living! Creating! Dancing! But things got out of hand. People made their own rules. Maybe they were orderly but it was not *good* order. Check out Genesis 6-7-8 and 9. The flood. Literally and figuratively chaos. God breaks up the bad, oppressive order with disorder. Then God brings back good order. (This is how we know for sure God is Presbyterian.) Human systems can grow greedy, rigid and authoritarian. It’s their nature. Revolutions break out. Chaos happens. Where’s God in this? Depends on what follows: sometimes a little chaos can correct bad order. Sometimes it just gets worse.

But what do I mean by ecstasy? What do you think ecstasy means? Supreme happiness, bliss, euphoria, etc. Yes. But how? “Ex” means “out of” as in “exit.” “-Stasy” means stoppage, as in “stasis.” Ecstasy moves us out of stillness, out of death. God’s loving ecstasy can bring even worn out stuffed bunnies to life (as in *The Velveteen Rabbit*). Ecstasy takes us out of ourselves to where God is inviting you to take a risk and join the dance.



Nothing’s wrong with comfort. New humans need comfort and nurturing. Mommy. Fuzzy bunny. Good shepherd. “I’m blessed—” we say. But that can easily turn into, “So God must love me best.” (If, like Deloris Wilson of Cabrini Green, you can lose your only son to gang violence, then forgive and embrace the boys who shot him, and *still* say you’re blessed and mean it, I might believe you.) But, if we never leave that comfort zone, we’re vulnerable. When bad things happen we lose that loving feeling, I think God’s heart aches for us then. Hurts with us. If we don’t understand that, we’re liable to throw God out with the comfort bunny. That’s worse. Life loses order and meaning.



Let me be absolutely clear. God doesn’t *make* bad things happen to teach us a lesson. God does want us to outgrow our comforting stuffed bunny and gain a living vision of the God of life. God’s ultimate will is for you to be like them, made to be like God. Creating! Dancing! So maybe that’s not Father-Son-and-Holy Spirit for you; maybe Mother-Sister-Daughter works better. Red, yellow, brown or green. I think God delights in expanding our imagination of her!

Think of this: I’ll bet Meg remembers when Tristan was baptized. Could she have loved that child any more then? I doubt it. Isn’t she proud that he’s a fine athlete and, even better, a kind and generous young man, ready to stand up today and confirm his faith to you, who modeled faith for him? Whoever our children grow up to be, we’re happiest when they grow more fully into themselves.

And God’s got everything to do with it. Because if not for God, what are we even doing here? And why do I bring this up today of all days? Because, dearly beloved, you are saying goodbye

to three leaders, as well as three beautiful children who need their parents for a while yet. It's fair to say you can expect a bumpy ride. A little disorder. A little vulnerability. Maybe even a little chaos. But I hope you can feel the ecstasy in this, too. Release the status quo! Revel in the unknown future!



I say this today because my prayer for you is to experience God in ways you've never imagined. I expect you to grow beyond your wildest expectations. You can do it. Pastors and musicians are not magicians who can pull God out of a hat on cue! (Sorry if that disappoints you.) It's God who gives the growth.

And so I leave you with something like Paul's last words to the church at Corinth: "Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order (but don't shun a little disorder); listen to my appeal, agree with one another (or if you disagree, do it peacefully). The God of loving ecstasy will be with you. Greet one another in holy song. All the saints of every time and place, every color and creed, every ability and gender preference—all those saints are waiting for you to join the dance. The grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you. Let the mystery be." (2 Corinthians 13:9-13)

Prayers:

God of chaos, order, and ecstasy, lift us beyond ourselves to realms beyond imagining, to acts of love and service undreamed of, to wider networks of community in this world and the next. Help us grow to be what you created us to be.

We pray for all places on earth where crushing order reigns, where rigid rules stifle creativity, where the few suppress the many. May we work toward liberation and full humanity for all, remembering that love in public is called justice.

We ask that those whose physical selves are encumbered with illness or trouble of any kind be liberated in spirit to join the joyful dance of your own self: We ask that your Spirit go before the family as they move this week, and rest especially on Tristan, newly confirmed in faith, as he makes new friends in a new school.

We pray with all families in mourning, knowing that grief is a long journey. May they see the light of hope in your path of dying and rising again. All this we ask with confidence in your living love, Amen.