

Creation in Christ Sunday
15 Pentecost; September 6, 2026
Saint John's Episcopal Church
Genesis 1:1-2:3; Psalm 148:1-14; Acts 17:22a, 24-28; John 1:1-5

Before I get to my sermon proper, I want to say how excited I am to be at Saint John's. You may not now know it, but you have a reputation in the diocese for being small but mighty. I spent time this week reading the books celebrating your bicentennial, and I see that your reputation has always been well-deserved.

I'm also excited to be here because I began my priesthood as a vicar serving a parish in Georgia that was almost exactly the same size as Saint John's. That parish was Saint James, who, as you probably know, was the brother of Saint John.

I look forward to getting to know you as we worship together. And I look forward to working with the people of First Congregational as well. Thank you for being here this morning!

One last preliminary comment. I love the fact that my first Sunday as your new vicar is Creation Sunday. It's a reminder that God's work of creation is ongoing, that God is creating new life here and now, as we begin our work together.

On to the readings!

As we heard in our LONG reading from Genesis, God speaks creation into existence by proclaiming, "Let there be..." whatever God is creating that day.

But God does more than create in Genesis. As God creates, God also blesses. God blesses all living things. And we get the best blessing of all. God creates humans in God's own image and likeness, blesses us with fertility, and gives us dominion over the rest of creation.

Now, that word "dominion" has created a lot of confusion over the years. Some have interpreted dominion to mean that God gives us the right to exploit creation however we want.

That interpretation is clearly wrong.

As Genesis two clarifies, we were created to “till and keep” the garden God gives to us, not to wreck creation if we feel like it. We are stewards of creation on God’s behalf, and we are responsible to God for how we do as stewards.

Unfortunately, we haven’t been very good stewards. The problems begin at the beginning. The first couple sins, and their sin compromises their relationship with God, with each other, and with the rest of creation. We get that story in Genesis three. We also get that versions of that story in the news pretty much every day.

Thankfully, our Gospel reading reminds us that all things came into being through God’s “Word,” through Christ. And Christ always shines as a light. No matter how dark things may seem, the darkness cannot overcome the light of Christ.

Our gift, as Christian people, is the invitation to bathe in the light of Christ, to receive God’s grace and love. And our task, as Christian people, is to testify to that light, and to share it with others.

I experienced the light of Christ in creation most dramatically when I was in my late thirties. I was seeing a counsellor, who was great. But she always began our sessions by asking me to draw a picture of how I was feeling. I hated that! But she insisted it would be good for me, so, with very poor humor, I drew something at the beginning of every session.

My counsellor didn’t draw. But well into our work together, she told me that if she had drawn me when I first came to her, she would have drawn a giant head with no body.

Sadly, that unflattering description was fair. At the time, I lived in my head so much that it was compromising my relationships.

So, that’s what we worked on. I had help from two scruffy little boys who didn’t care at all about the things I tended to think about. They just wanted to wrestle. Now that they are strong young men, we can’t wrestle anymore. But my younger son still occasionally feels the need to pick me up when I

am doing something particularly embarrassing and hold me in the air until I agree to stop. It makes me long for the days when I could do that to him!

I also began to spend more intentional time in God's creation, especially by taking up gardening and backpacking. And in creation, Christ's light did indeed shine into my darkness. My counsellor even told me at the end of our work together that, if she were to draw me that day, she would add a body to her picture of me.

I can still retreat into my head. But I have a personal rule of life, and part of my rule is a commitment to spend at least a few minutes outside each day.

But for me, I think for many people, getting time outside has become harder in recent years, thanks in large part to the increasing role of technology in our lives.

So, here's a more recent experience of creation as a sacrament of God's grace and love.

My wife, Carrie, spends a lot of time on her phone.

Before I go farther, I need to say that Carrie comes up a lot in my sermons. It's an occupational hazard of being married to a preacher. But I am not a fool. I know where I live. Before mentioning Carrie in a sermon, I always get her permission.

So, a couple of weeks ago, Carrie and I went on a short backpacking trip in Vermont. On our way north, Carrie realized that she had left her phone at home. That was not a happy realization. Carrie is accustomed to being connected. Without her phone, she wouldn't be.

For a few minutes, Carrie was in serious distress. But Carrie is a trooper, we carried on, and we had a great trip.

As we drove home at the end of the week, Carrie told me, with surprise, that she had really enjoyed not having her phone for four days. What had initially caused her distress turned out to be a gift, time in the woods without the distraction of her phone.

What Carrie experienced on our trip has been confirmed by psychological studies. In one, three sets of students were asked to complete tasks and engage new information. The first set had their phones turned off and upside down, but still on their desks. The second set had their phones turned off and out of sight in their backpacks. The third set didn't have their phones with them at all.

It turns out that just having your phone near you is distracting, even if you don't look at it, even if it's off. The students with phones on their desks didn't do as well as the students with phones in their backpacks, and the students with phones in their backpacks didn't do as well as the students who didn't have their phones.

We have gotten so absorbed into a virtual world of our own creation, that it constantly eats away at our attention, including to God's creation. And, as more and more studies show, too much time with our phones is not good for our psychological well-being.

By temporarily severing her ties with the virtual world, Carrie was able on our trip to engage more fully in God's creation and to experience in a deeper way God's healing grace and love. That's something we can all do, at least for short periods. And it's something that most of us need.

And so, on this Creation Sunday, I thank God for the gift of creation, for the light of Christ, and for the invitation to experience God's healing presence, all around us all the time. In Christ's name. Amen.