"Days of the Week" -- Sermon Series for Lent & Easter

"Day 2 -- Divisions"
Genesis 1:6-8 & Mark 11:15-19

Lent Midweek 2 -- March 3, 2004
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls

Texts Suggested Hymns (TLH)
Psalm 148
Genesis 1:6-8
2 Peter 3:5-9
Mark 11:15-19

Suggested Hymns (TLH)
Sweet the Moments, Rich in Blessing (155)
Throned upon the Awe-full Tree (174)
Enslaved by Sin and Bound in Chains (141)

I. Creation

Day 2 begins with a well-lighted glob of mud surrounded by water. The Scriptures do not tell us what the Lord chooses the process that He does; nevertheless, though He need not do it this way, He acts like a sculptor of clay: Start with a formless mass and shape it into what He desires. As part of that, on Day 2 God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven (Gen 1:7-8b).

The day began with water on the surface, and ended with a division of the water into surface below and sky above. These millennia later, it is difficult to pinpoint what exactly this means scientifically, though many theories abound. We leave that speculation for now, and look at two important points thing of which we are certain.

First, the Lord is creating the earth in this way for us. All that He does is good, and all the work that He does on the earth is to create a paradise for Adam and Eve, and their offspring who will follow. The Lord is carefully preparing the way for seas and lakes and rivers below, and an atmosphere with humidity above. Given the dry air of winter and the desert drought of summer in these parts, we have an inkling of how important this is for our comfort and well-being. We haven't gotten to the plants and trees and birds and fish yet; but the Lord is work on the minute details of earth and atmosphere for your good.

Second, the Lord gives this firmament a name: He calls the firmament "heaven." This is not the heaven of His eternal glory where He dwells with angels, but the skies-the heavens that we see above. But the fact that He names it is important. The Lord doesn't need it to have a name for Himself. Rather, He gives it a name so that we know what to call it. He gives it a name to reveal it to

us. More importantly, He gives it a name to reveal some of Himself to us: The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork, shouts Psalm 19:1. Psalm 50:6 adds, "Let the heavens declare His righteousness, For God Himself is Judge."

The Lord sets the heavens in place so that we might see His glory proclaimed. The majesty of His creation declares His power, His might and His righteousness. It declares to us that we are in the keeping of a Creator who is far, far mightier than we! This should lead us to bow before Him in solemn reverence and humble service.

But sin is always seeking to twist the things of God so that we trust in them and leave God behind; and so the sinful nature works to make the creation into a god for us.

Consider these situations in the present day. Many reject the notion of a present, loving God who keeps and preserves the world. If God is not present and preserving, it means that we are on our own. If we are on our own, then it means that it is up to us to preserve the world. After all, "This world is all we've got!" is a common saying. In a way, this is true-in the realms of this universe, this is the only habitable planet we have. However, this is a dangerous statement when it means that it is the planet which keeps us alive, not the Creator of heaven and earth.

However, it is popular in our present day to turn the earth into the god-or goddess-of choice. Some will teach that the earth is one giant organism, and we human beings are just one small part of the whole: By being born, living and dying, we are serving the greater body-the planet. In the extreme, it becomes very religious indeed among environmentalists: Man sins against Mother Earth by polluting, consuming resources, enlarging the hole in the ozone. Therefore, mankind must stop these wicked practices and let Mother Earth return to her natural state. Now, admittedly, those who pursue such neo-paganism and get that spooky are almost certainly in a minority. However, while many don't go that far, those who trust in the earth to maintain and preserve life are guilty of the same sin: They have made this planet a god, rejecting the true God who created it.

I hastily add that, as Christians, we do not encourage pollution, waste or mistreatment of this world. In fact, we encourage responsible care of our resources, but for an entirely different reason. Those who trust in the planet encourage environmentalism because they believe it is the planet keeping them alive. We encourage responsible use because we believe in the God who created this world, and we believe that He has entrusted its stewardship to us.

Worship of the earth is common. So is worship of the firmament. Some religions feature rain dances, encouraging the clouds to pour out their moisture, or sun worship. However, many look through the firmament to gaze upon the stars; and practicing astrology, they seek to predict their fortunes upon placement of stars and alignments of planets. Astrology remains a temptation, as it has throughout history. Those who trust in the stars are placing their lives in the hands of spheres of burning gasses. Those who trust in planet alignment are placing themselves in the care of objects that can't even support life on their own surface.

Once given a little thought, to trust in either this planet or heavenly bodies becomes absurd. But the absurdity isn't amusing when one considers how sin causes people to believe such things and trust in them instead of the Lord. This is the work of sin. The Lord creates heaven and earth to display His glory and care for you; the Old Adam works hard to use His creation to make you reject Him.

Truly, all of us are guilty of trusting in creation more than the Creator. It is easy to rely on the grain for bread instead of He who provides the seed and earth, and easy to doubt the Lord when food becomes scarce. It is easy for each of us to reason, "As long as I have enough resources at my disposal, then I am doing all right." But this is trust in material things, not the God who created the material.

Therefore, the Lord would have us repent of our trust in creation rather than Him. He orders all things for our good, and too often we give it the reverence which is due to Him.

This is why we give thanks that the Lord does not limit His revelation to His creation. No, He speaks far more specifically to us in His Word, so that we might be saved from our sin. And in His Word, He declares to us that, as He carefully orchestrated creation for our good, so also has He carefully worked our redemption for our salvation. We see Him thus at work on Day 2 of Holy Week.

II. Passion

On one of the hills of Jerusalem stands the temple, the house of God. This is where God dwells with His people. This is where sacrifices are offered to Him, where the blood of animals is shed. The message of the temple is this: God is here for your good. He is here for your salvation, and He will save you by the shedding of blood. Not the blood of these animals; no, they only point to the Savior who will come and shed His blood. But as surely as the heavens and the earth declare the glory of God and that He preserves this creation for your good, so this temple declares that the Lord is working a plan of redemption for your salvation.

But if sin will tempt man to use the earth in order to deny God's plan, it will work doubly hard to get man to use the temple for sinful purposes, so that he might once again deny the Lord.

So it has happened in Jerusalem. Sacrifices are to be offered, so animals must be provided. Pilgrims must often buy their animals when they arrive in the city, so a marketplace has sprung up at the temple. To make it worse, this market will only deal in temple coins; therefore, pilgrims must first exchange their money into the proper currency-at a fee, of course. If you're looking for oversight and correction from the scribes and chief priests, you'll be disappointed: They're in on the operation.

The Lord establishes His temple to testify that He is at work for man's salvation, and that He Himself will pay the price. Man takes the temple and says, "You have to come here to worship God, and you can; but first you've got to pay a heavy price to us before you can move on." If the Lord is at work to shed His own blood for our salvation, how wicked of man to extract a further price from worshipers!

On Day 2, Jesus goes into the temple. He drives out those selling animals and overturns the tables of the moneychangers. The temple is to be a house of prayer for all nations, prayer to the gracious God who gives all good things. They have turned it into a den of thieves, a market for personal gain. By focusing upon their profit and gain, they have desecrated this holy place of God. They have turned the attention from His grace to their greed. They will cause devout worshipers to stumble as they are mistaken for those who truly represent God. Furthermore, Jesus is a less than a week from shedding His blood on the cross for their salvation; they are using His Father's house for personal, selfish increase.

The old sinful nature doesn't like to have its plans interfered with; and immediately the scribes and

chief priests are scheming to have Jesus killed. In a few days, they will succeed, and you will hear them shout "Crucify Him" with the rest of the crowd.

But note the goodness of the Lord once again. Sinful man twists creation to get God out of the picture, then twists the temple to do the same. He then takes the Son of God and puts Him on the cross to get Him out of the way as well. However, the Lord who created all things for man, and who established His temple for man's good, will now use the cross for man's salvation. Sinners think they have put Him to death to be rid of Him; He dies so that He might be present with repentant sinners always. No matter the wickedness of man, God is faithfully at work for mankind, that all who believe in Him might be saved.

As we are tempted to trust in created things more than the Creator, so also we are tempted to use sacred things for our purposes rather than God's. It is tempting to want worship to be about us and what we have accomplished, rather than to confess that we are poor sinners who cannot accomplish anything toward our salvation. It is tempting to turn the Lord's Supper into a celebration of us getting together, rather than the Lord coming to forgive sins. It is tempting to measure a church by outward success rather than faithful adherence to the Word of God.

Yet the Lord still works for our good. He who died for us on the cross and rose again is faithful to His promises. He still sends out His Word to call us to repentance and faith in Him. He still cleanses His people from their sin in Holy Baptism. He is still present in His Supper for the forgiveness of sins. He knows our sinful propensity to trust in anything but Him, and that is precisely why He died.

Therefore, we give thanks to the Lord who ordered this creation for us, and who has gone to the cross for our redemption. And by His grace, we have hope; on account of our sin, He has indeed been crucified. And risen again, He continues to grant us forgiveness and salvation. No matter the condition of this failing creation, we know that we are the Lord's. And when our last day here comes, we know that we remain the Lord's in heaven for eternity.

The Lord order your days and your deeds in His peace, for you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen