

5.31.2026 Holy Trinity Sunday  
Genesis 1:26-2:4, Psalm 8, 2 Corinthians 13:11-13, Matthew 28:16-20  
"Created to Create"

Pastor Ali Rode

"Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened to you."  
Good morning Beloved Children of God.

Before you were born, as you were being fashioned to enter into life in the way we know it, as you were divinely designed our Creator looked at you, in the darkness of the womb and considered, "This is good." We see that throughout Genesis. God speaks into chaos, creates order and says, "This is good." I had an old preacher eons past, can't remember who it was who said, "If God had a wallet, your picture would be in it." Now I hope there's some old fashioned folks around here that put pictures in their wallets. It's much more likely we have albums of photos in our phones.

My middle name is joy, and that name was spontaneous. My mother of course tells this story, because I cannot remember. She knew my name was going to be Alexander or Alexandra depending on how I presented myself when I came into this world, but she didn't know what my middle name would be. When she held me in her arms she said, "Joy, Joy will be her middle name." There was this overwhelming assurance about choosing that name and as I've grown into that name, that middle name Joy, those of you who have gotten a chance to get to know me I'm very exuberant, I'm very excited I'm very playful. So Joy fits very well, but also on the other side joy is not always happiness. There's a "stick-to-it-ness" and a resilience that joy brings. I have that too. And I say all of this not to promote myself, but to say that that gift was a gift divinely inspired by God to my mother. There's these gifts that God gives to us.

And as we see reflected in the Genesis creation narrative where repeatedly the writer said, "And God saw it was good" God as the creator delights in speaking things into being in the midst of chaos, and then admiring the creation.

And we are created in the image of God, as we are reminded in Genesis. And we know God is creator... therefore made in the image of God we are inherently creative. Some of you will say Pastor, you've not seen my drawings! How dare you call me creative! I can't sing. Don't put me on a stage. In what way am I creative? But some of you same people will be able to take a stack of old bills and papers of a friend who needs your help and categorize and organize a mess of left behind tasks and help them out of a precarious situation. You want to talk about creativity and making things work? That's creative! Others of you can do magnificent things with an excel spreadsheet, blueprints, recipes, schedules. You may not be able to choose the right color shoe to wear with a certain pair of pants, but boy could you coach little league.

Creativity has a myriad of ways of expressing itself. And some of us are traditionally creative in the arts. I've always enjoyed creating things from an early age, whether it be blanket forts, drawings... I used to sit in my closet at a young age with a lite brite set making illuminated pictures with little plastic pins and construction paper. I've told some of our Family Ministry folks, and the call committee if I wasn't a pastor I'd be an art teacher or interior designer. I sing, I've danced (not professionally!), I enjoy throwing pottery and using mixed media. I play violin, I've been in handbell choir. I share this not to make a list of my talents... but to say that these are things that come naturally to me. I share them as an observation of the talents that Creator God has given me. And in the same measure, for each of you, you harness creativity because you are made in the image of God.

And I would say of the churches I've served I believe we may have more talent when it comes to the arts specifically. Today we honor our high school graduate Riley Smith who has danced with Charlotte Ballet and will continue to pursue professional dance. What artistry, what capacity to display creative inspiration!

Beginning this week coming up we will host Bacharlotte with incredible musicians including our own Les Ackerman. Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday. In this space these walls will reverberate with the divine creativity inspired by writers, composers, and instrumentalists. The instruments in many of these pieces are antique themselves, hand crafted. Simultaneously we enjoy the creativity of the composer, the instrumentalists, and those who crafted the instruments. Its a cacophony of creativity. If you are member of St. Mark's you will get discounted ticket pricing, simply come to the ticket counter in the gathering place prior to the show for access. I hope you also might come and greet others who may be coming into our sanctuary for the first time.

I was in seminary looking forward to finishing up my hours for my degree and a course came up called "Art, Spirituality, and Creativity," and I thought I'm going to be the first person to sign up for that class. Arriving there was one main book for the course and it was called, "The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity" by Julia Cameron. She is a woman of faith, but the book is a "spiritual-but-not-religious" type of book. It's based on the 12 steps, if you're familiar with recovery circles. She talks about creativity and the divine in a variety of ways. Here are just three of her ten basic principles:

- When we open ourselves to our creativity, we open ourselves to the creator's creativity within us and our lives.
- Creativity is God's gift to us. Using our creativity is our gift back to God.
- Our creative dreams and yearnings come from a divine source. As we move toward our dreams, we move toward our divinity.

In my discernment as I was coming to St. Mark's we had arrived in July and I began in December, so there was some time in between. I visited a local United Methodist Church, Woodlawn Community Fellowship, where the pastor Jonathan Coppedge-Henley invited me to coffee. Later that week we shared coffee and conversation for about three hours or so, and during that chat he asked me, "Have you ever heard of the book "The Artist's Way" by Julia Cameron? Do you know how many pastors there are in Charlotte, and how many books have been published in the world, that he would sit across the table from me and drop the same title of a book that has significantly impacted my life? He said, "I really want to do a book study with this." It's been on my heart for some time. I lead a group some years back. It could be a way to build community outside of the local church. I think how wonderful it is when we are just open to God's spirit, and God to lead us.

This morning we also honor the mystery of the theological construct of the Trinity wherein we understand our creator as three in one, which is a divine mystery, very creative: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There have been a variety of explanations of the trinity: Ice, Glass of Water, and a tea kettle with vapor. They are solid, liquid, gas, but all water essentially. Some of you will want to argue technicalities with this metaphor. Yes, they are all water, but they look different. This idea is lacking in my estimation.

Rather, a second idea of trying to describe the Trinity is a dance. We have the three-in-one this dynamic experience of how God presents God's self to us in this world. In oneness, God shows God's self to us in different ways, in different fashions, images, experiences. God delights in interacting and displaying creative power through a variety of medium, like all good artists.

In getting to know this pastor I had coffee with, I learned about Creative Morning Charlotte which is part of Charlotte is Creative. Did you know that Charlotte is seen as a hub for Creatives? They meet once a month and they have vibrant energy, they fill auditoriums, get up and dance, share micro-grants, inspire one another with their talents, and have an inspirational speaker every time. The energy in the room is palpable at 8:00am. I've visited on three occasions. In Creative Mornings, and my exploration in the creative arts in Charlotte, and work in Family Ministry I've learned we had a couple students at Charlotte Ballet, and so as a part of getting to know people in the area I volunteered to hand out programs at a performance entitled "Boundless" for Charlotte Ballet in March. I was able to enjoy the show in the second-half which was audience participation. Everyone sat on stools in a square formation.

I did not know what was coming. After the intermission, I was on a front row of benches with the Smith Family. There was a high energy, funky creative, engaging dance that happened for a good period of time. And then the audience participation... and your pastor was in the front row. I couldn't help but think all my years of Color Guard have brought me to this moment. And one of the dancers comes to me, stares me down to the sole of my shoes, with his hands outstretched, waiting for me to take his hands. When I took his hands, I did not know what the steps were going to be. I did not know what I would be doing. Doesn't this sound like the Divine that invites us each day? To dance? We don't know what the steps are going to be, but we have the chance to present ourselves and say, "Hey, here I am. I am willing to dance."

And so he took my hand, and thank God it was one of those opportunities where the dancer did something and then I did something, and we imitated each other, and wow, isn't that like the faith journey too? We hear from God, through the Word, and then we embody it in our lives? It's this Holy Dance, this Holy creative experience. And so now I can say I danced with Charlotte Ballet, as a joke.

In all seriousness, this is the Divine Trinity experience. This is creativity at work. And I want to be asked to dance. God is inviting us to dance, because we are divinely created, by a Divine Creator, to be creative.