

Finding Our Place in All Creation
Genesis 1:1, 26-31

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A surgeon, an architect, and a politician found themselves in a friendly debate about which of their honored professions happened to be the oldest. “The Lord removed a rib from Adam’s side,” said the surgeon, “in order to create Eve. That was obviously a surgical procedure.” “Yes,” replied the architect, “but the world was formless and void before the Spirit of the Lord moved upon it. The precision of the universe had to be the result of a masterful, architectural design.” The politician, taking a long puff from his cigar, smiled and said, “And who do you think created the chaos in the first place?”

I invite you these summer Sundays to revisit your Biblical roots. As surely as families need to know their ancestors and businesses need to understand their predecessors, so people of faith need to grapple with their beginnings. How did we get here? Where is God? What does it take to survive a flood? And what can we do and learn from family feuds? Let us see life from our beginnings!

Today, on our way to Communion, let us consider again the Genesis story of Creation.

IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH.

With this simple, but profound, affirmation of faith, the Bible begins. Throughout the scriptures this affirmation of creation is repeated and restated. Isaiah 40:28 says, “Do you not know, have you not heard, The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth?” Acts 4:15 states “Turn from worthless things to the living God who made the heavens and the earth. Hebrews 11:13 says, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” Isaac Watts said it well so long ago:

Behold the mighty power of God that made the mountains rise.

That spread the flowing seas abroad, and built the lofty skies.

Behold the wisdom that ordains the sun to rule the day. The moon shines full at God’s command, and all the stars obey.

The year was 1925. The place was Dayton, Tennessee. John T. Scopes, a biology teacher at Rhea County Central High School, was put on trial for violating Tennessee State Law by teaching the theory of evolution in his public school classroom. William Jennings Bryan prosecuted the case. The Honorable Clarence Darrow represented the defense. Mr. Scopes was found guilty eight days later and fined \$100 for breaking Tennessee law, but the verdict was later reversed on technical grounds by the State Supreme Court. The so-called “Monkey Trial” set in motion a circus that continues today, seventy-seven years later.

What is this war of words that will not go away in America? Is it the fault of ultra fundamentalists who insist on the incorrect Biblical interpretation of John Lightfoot that the world was created specifically and precisely on Sunday, October 23rd 4004 B.C. with humans appearing on the planet the following Friday at about 9:00 a.m.? Is that the problem? Or is it the plot of atheistic materialists who want to purge God from all of life leaving our very existence to the impersonal, unpredictable random chance?

If we could ever stop shouting at one another long enough, we might find common ground along the paths of universal order which points to a prime mover whom we know to be in Hebrew as Elohim, the Creator of all, with whom a thousand years is but a day or as a watch in the night when it is past.

In the meantime, let this simple affirmation that opens the Bible ground our hope and our faith. In the beginning, God.....all things begin and cohere with that profound faith. God is in our beginning and in our ending. We are not alone. We live in God's world. *We believe in God who has created and is creating*, says the creed we use often in worship. Let that old Biblical creation story empower us to understand that we are the creation of God.

AND GOD SAW ALL THAT HE HAD MADE AND IT WAS VERY GOOD. V. 31

In fact, good seems to be the prominent word of the creation story of Genesis 1. It was good, it was very good. Like an artist that has painted a masterpiece, a poet who has stirred souls with a poem, a musician who has raised the congregation to its feet in praise, so it is that the God of creation steps back from his work and says, "Ah yes, that's what I want it to be. It is just right. Very good."

To be good is to be right. To be good is to be reliable. To be good is to be fitting. To be good is to be flawless. Goodness is not a sudden blaze of glory won. Goodness is not fame and glory. Goodness is the accomplishment of the purpose for which we were made. Goodness is at the core of the universe.

Wendell Berry is an author and poet who still lives close to the place of my birth. He writes novels about small town life on the Kentucky River and he writes poetry about nature itself. In one of his works he says, "When despair for the world grows in me, and I wake in the night in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be, I go and lie down where the wood drake rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds. I come into the peace of wild things, who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief. I come into the presence of still water and I feel above me the day blind stars waiting with their light. For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and I am free."

I suspect that everybody needs a place like that. A place to reconnect with that which is good at the core of the earth. A place where goodness still reigns and things are still right with the universe.

For goodness sake—*for goodness sake* leave the world a better place than you found it. *For goodness sake* find a need and try to fill it. *For goodness sake* live your life with integrity because it matters to the generations yet to come. *For goodness sake* praise God from whom all blessings flow. Oh, could it be that God would review all that we do and still be able to say it is very good.

They are old words, you know them as well as I. In the beginning God created and God saw everything that he had made and it was very good. And one other little phrase....

AND GOD SAID LET US MAKE HUMAN BEINGS IN OUR IMAGE (V. 26)

Humans have dignity that must not be denied. You are a chip off the divine block, a spittin' image of your heavenly parent. Before you were born, God molded you in the depths of the earth and knitted you together in your mother's womb. God has carved you on the palm of his hand and hidden you in the shadow of his embrace. Even the hairs on your head are numbered by God. Whether you are red, yellow, black or white, you are precious in God's sight.

You were not made to act like a monkey, breed like a rabbit, fight like a tiger, or roar like a lion. You were made to be a human being created as a reflection of God on the earth. You are more than a complex animal. You are a child of God. You have the power to reason, the capacity to love, the ability to serve. You are a human being. There is no such thing as just a mere human being. You are a precious human being.

You have worth, value, purpose and place in this universe. It has been a long, long time ago now, but I will never forget it. A severely handicapped child had been inspired by a ministry of our denomination to believe that he had worth and value. He, with a group of others, composed a choir which sang with unusual confidence and joy. At one point in the concert, this kid had a solo. The crowd waited as he pulled his crippled body to the microphone and began with these words, "I am a promise, I am a possibility, I am a promise with a capital P. I am a great big bundle of potentiality." Before he could get to the next line of that little song, the crowd came to its feet in praise, thanksgiving, and pentecostal joy to the Lord. Oh, my friends, let us never forget, we were created with promise. We were born with possibility.

Such kinship to God brings a particular partnership with God. As children of God, the first chapter of the Bible tells us we are supposed to help God take care of the place. We are responsible as the supreme of creation to make the place safe. If there is a hole in the ozone, then it is our problem. If our streams are polluted, it is our issue. If haze covers our cities and hazards fill our highways, then is it not a result of our greed and our grabbing and search for glory? Sooner or later we must become accountable to the God who created us and put us in charge of the place.

As children of God, we are called to be faithful. We are also called to be fruitful.

God probably meant more by this than just having children. Sow the seeds of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Let the sacredness of human life permeate our decisions concerning issues like abortion, euthanasia, and human cloning. Let that old story speak to us about the dignity of human life. You see our beginnings determine our endings, to paraphrase the psalmist.

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.
You have set your glory above the heavens
From the lips of children you have ordained praise
You have made us humans a little lower than angels
and crowned us with glory and honor.
O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name.

Amen

