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Creation 6

We all have stories that make meaning for us. The ones we pass down to our children. Our family has stories about why we eat chocolate gravy on biscuits and why we don't drink milk with fish. They may not always make a lot of sense to outsiders, but they help us, to understand who we are.

The people of Israel were no different. They may not have had stories about biscuits, but they had their own foundational stories that shaped them and spoke to what was important. That helped them to make meaning out of the world around them—a world that was often hostile and difficult to navigate. Many of those stories are found in the Book of Genesis.

For the past several weeks, we've been hearing the pieces of the first of those foundational narratives—the story of creation. “In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth...” And so forth.

Over the years, this particular account of creation has caused no shortage of debate. Is it true? Did God create the world in six short days, resting on the seventh? If so, how do we make sense of evolution and the scientific evidence that shows that the world as we know it today evolved over billions of years and that humans are relatively new to this place we call earth?

Many who accept the science of evolution but still want this story to have meaning and purpose, have called it a myth and refer to the role of mythology as a way for our ancestors to explain the world as they knew it.

But many theologians today, particularly Walter Brueggemann, have begun to insist that this text is neither the language of “scientific history” or “mythology.” Instead, they claim that this first Creation narrative is a proclamation. In it and through it, the authors proclaim something vital to their understanding of themselves and their relationship to God. They proclaim that God and God's creation are bound together. That God spoke all of creation into being and will continue to be in relationship with it. This narrative, therefore, is not an abstract statement about the origin of the universe but a theological statement about God's faithfulness to us, God's creation.¹

This proclamation was a big deal to these early Israelites because it was made in spite of the reality that surrounded them. This creation story was finalized in the sixth century BCE—so about 2600 years ago. And it was meant for the people of Israel who were living, not in their homeland, but in exile. Despite the ancient promise of God to make a great nation of Israel, the Israelites had been defeated in battle. The Babylonian Empire conquered them and dispersed the people. During this time of exile, the Israelites weren't really feeling the faithfulness of God. It likely seemed to them that it was the Babylonian gods who controlled the world while the God of Israel had been conquered and silenced.

But against such claims, this Genesis story of creation affirms that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is still God, the one who created and the one who continues to watch over creation and who will one day bring it to fulfillment.

We continue to this day to live in a world that makes us wonder if our Creator is invested in relationship with the created. Mostly because we realize that we ourselves

have turned against God and acted in our own interests, not in the interest of the health of creation. But this story in Genesis declares that the relationship between creator and creation is guaranteed, despite our shortcomings and rebellions. And furthermore, it declares that the relationship between God and humanity is not one of coercion or requirement or obligation. It is one of trust. God invites us into relationship.

What this particular story proclaims is that all creation, all created things including humans, are a blessing. God declares them good. Indeed, very good. Furthermore, God brought this creation into being out of a formless void and darkness. Out of chaos, God brought order. This story reassures us that even out of the chaos of our world and the chaos of our lives, God calls us to a greater purpose.²

It is also in this story that we hear that we were created in the image of God and that the rest of creation is given to our care. This implies both power and great responsibility. But we must tread carefully with those words dominion and subdue that we heard in our text this morning. We know that those words have been misused to justify great damage done to God's creation. To repair that damage, we must insist that the dominion and subjugation called for at creation were not intended to give permission for humans to exploit and abuse. God created humans as partners that would help "secure the well-being of every other creature and bring the promise of each to full fruition."³

God called us to serve, not to dominate. God shows us that model for humanity in the person of Jesus. We see this in the words Jesus spoke to James and John and all of the disciples in today's Gospel story. They were seeking glory and power, but Jesus insists that they learn to serve others. That model of serving others began at creation when we were called to be "agents of God"—to us much was given, but also much was expected.⁴

This early identity as agents of God speaks to a human yearning for a sacramental existence. A yearning to be in sacred relationship with our Creator. We see this in baptism. When we make the sign of the cross on the forehead of the baptized, we say, "You are sealed as Christ's own forever." This is an extraordinary claim. In it we are saying that that you are marked, named and destined for a life of sacred relationship—a life defined by the love of God not the culture and ideologies of the world around you.⁵

This creation story in Genesis, and the other foundational stories of this first book of our Bible, gave Jews in exile a distinct narrative identity that proclaimed a truth for them that they were valued and worthy and loved despite their defeat by the Babylonians. In a similar way, the sacrament of baptism and the story of Jesus' love for us, grants us a distinct identity that gives us value beyond what anyone else tells us we are worth.

Within this story of creation, we, the people of God, begin to really understand who we are. We are blessed. We are made in God's image. We are called into relationship and covenant. We are the creation of God—to whom much has been given and from whom much is expected. May we live into that call today and every day. Amen.

1. Brueggemann, Walter. "Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching—Genesis." Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1982, 26-27.
2. Brueggemann, 29-30.
3. Brueggemann, 32.
4. Brueggemann, 33.
5. Brueggemann, Walter. "Preaching from the Old Testament." Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019, 8.