

The Second Creation

^{NRS} **Genesis 1:1** In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

³ Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

⁴ **And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.**

⁵ **God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.**

⁶ And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." ⁷ So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so.

⁸ **God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.**

⁹ And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so.

¹⁰ **God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.**

¹¹ Then God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it." And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it.

And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. ¹⁶ God made the two great lights-- the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night-- and the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness.

And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." ²¹ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind.

And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so.

²⁵ **God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.**

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." ²⁷ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." ²⁹ God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

³¹ **God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.**

^{NRS} **Genesis 2:1** Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. ² And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.

³ **So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.** ⁴ These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

The Second Creation

Last Sunday we took a close look at the account of creation that's found in the second chapter of Genesis. Perhaps you wondered why we looked at chapter two last week and now we are going back to examine chapter one. You might recall that there are two passages about creation. The two accounts use different names for God, different vocabulary, and different styles of writing. When they're read in the original Hebrew, the differences are quite striking.

The passage in chapter two was most likely written about the time of King David and King Solomon, his son, that is, around 1000BC. The account in chapter one was most likely written during the Babylonian captivity, sometime around 600 BC. So, we are studying these two stories of creation in the order in which they were written.

About 600 BC, the Israelites were conquered by the Babylonian Empire and many of the people were carried off into captivity in Babylon. It's a traumatic experience to be conquered – especially if you think of yourselves as God's chosen people, living in the land God had promised you. And so, you weep and mourn. ^{NRS}
Psalm 137:1-4 By the rivers of Babylon-- there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion.² On the willows there we hung up our harps.³ For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"⁴ How could we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land? Being conquered and carried off to the land of those who defeated you, turns your mental world upside down. And you begin to wonder if the gods of your conquerors are more powerful than your God. The Babylonians had their own story about the beginning of the world, a story of fights between gods. The local gods in Babylon include sun, moon, and stars, as well as animal gods. And it was tempting to believe that those gods defeated your God.

The Israelite priests retold the story of creation in a way that emphasized the sovereignty of the God of Israel over all of creation. "The Babylonians think the world was created when one god slayed another and split his body in two to separate the earth and the sky. No, our God took the primeval chaos and with a breath began to put things in order. Our God spoke and there was light, spoke and the earth was sorted out from the seas. They worship the sun, moon, and stars. The God of Israel made them. They worship animal gods. The God of Abraham, our God, formed the animals out of the earth with but a word. All that you see, all that our captors worship, was made by our God, the God of Israel. Our God is more powerful than theirs." And this declaration of the power of God was written in a form that could be easily remembered and easily used in worship, lest the captive Israelites lose their trust in God and be tempted to worship the gods of their conquerors.

We're not so different from these ancient Israelites. When our lives are being turned upside down by the death of someone we love, we find comfort and strength in reminding ourselves who our God is, and we do it with ancient poetry. "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. . . ." In times of fear and danger we find hope in "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. . . ." And so it was that the ancient Israelites shored up their trust in God by reciting, "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth . . ."

Let's look at this account of creation in more detail. As the story opens, all is in chaos. Chaos was a frightening thing to people in ancient times. For instance, they saw the sea as a fearsome thing, unpredictable, uncontrollable, chaotic. In fact, much of the world around them was unpredictable and threatening and chaotic. But this account says that God made order out of the chaos. And as time went on, God imposed more and more order on the world.

In verse two, we are told that the *ruach* of God hovered over the face of the waters. The *ruach* of God, the breath of God, a wind from God, the spirit of God, hovered over the surface of the waters. It's been translated all three ways, and all three are accurate translations. God began to act upon the chaos. The breath of life began to infuse creation. God's spirit began to work upon the chaotic primordial stew. Methodically, steadily, inexorably, God transformed chaos into order.

More than just being orderly, creation is beautiful, it is interdependent, and it is beneficial. Six times, as the stages of creation were completed, God took note that "it is good." Then, at the end of the sixth day, God declared that all of creation is "**very good**." This isn't just a mechanical evaluation; this isn't simply an announcement that all of creation works somehow. It's more than that. It's an aesthetic judgment! Creation

looks good, feels good, smells good, sounds good, and tastes good. God is a creative artist! Creation is beautiful! It's wonderful!

In verse 22, God told the animals of the sea and the birds of the air, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." I think we're very uncomfortable if we read this closely. They're to be fruitful and multiply. That's God's will for them. What does it say about us when we prevent them from being fruitful and multiplying? When we over fish some species, when we pollute the streams, lakes, and oceans and foul the waters so that whole species are driven to extinction, are we not standing in the way of God's will that they be fruitful? When we hunted the carrier pigeon to extinction, when we killed off the Dodo bird because it was an easy target, were we not in direct violation of God's will for his artistic creation?

Verse 26 is rich in imagery, no pun intended. God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness." First of all, notice the plural here: Let **us** make humankind in **our** image. It's a temptation for Christians to read this through the lens of the doctrine of the Trinity. But the ancient Israelites had no concept of the Trinity and they weren't writing about "God in three persons." But they did picture God as sitting on a heavenly throne surrounded by heavenly creatures. Isaiah wrote in chapter six, "I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty. ² Seraphs were in attendance above him. ³ And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." ⁴ The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called." (Isa 6:1-4 NRS) The seraphim, the cherubim, and the angels make up the heavenly court, the beings in attendance to God.

Verse 26 reads, "Let us make humankind in our **image**, according to our **likeness**. We're being too small-minded if we think that we look like God and God looks like us. Because of the limitations of our minds, we speak of God in human ways. We say that God speaks to us, walks with us, and inclines his ear to us. But we should always keep from confusing the metaphors we use about God with reality. The Lord is spirit and we are to worship God in spirit. And it's possible that the commandment to make no images of God is to keep us from losing awareness that we are made in God's image and we are to reflect, mirror, be the image of God's love and work.

The third thing to note in verse 26 is that humankind is given dominion over the animals of the earth, sea, and sky. We've long interpreted dominion to mean that we were to dominate, that we were to use creation in whatever way we desired, that it was our God-given privilege and duty to use and use up resources of any and every sort. To have dominion over something is to have the position of ruling over it. But we should pay close attention to how God expects rulers to rule. Psalm 72 is very instructive on this issue. ^{NRS} **Psalm 72:1-15** (excerpts) "Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. ² May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. ⁴ May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor . . . He delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. ¹³ He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. ¹⁴ From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight. ¹⁵ Long may he live!" Those who rule, those who govern, whether it is over nature, over animals, over people, are to rule with God's justice, righteousness, and compassion. This passage not only informs us on how to have dominion over creation, but also how we are to rule over our fellow man. It would be a good thing if each of us were to write out Psalm 72 and take it into the voting booth each time we vote, as a reminder of what God expects from those who govern.

There is one last thing in chapter one that I think we all may be overlooking. In verses 29 and 30, God gives all of the vegetation to all of the animal kingdom as food. It doesn't say that God gave the fish for the alligator to eat, or the mouse for the owl to eat, or the sheep for humans to eat. The only food mentioned is all of the plants. Some read this as God created us to be vegetarians. Others see it as saying that non-violence – not even killing animals for food – is the divinely intended way of things.

Last week we noted not only the literary differences between these two accounts of creation, but also the differences in time (six days or one day) and the differences in the sequence of creation. So, what do the differences mean? How do we reconcile them? Of all of the different writings in the Bible, written over a period of eleven or twelve centuries, none were intended to be a scientific textbook. Most weren't intended to be history books, especially the way we expect history books to be written. But they are theological writings, that

is, they're about God and the relationship between people and God. Number of days doesn't matter. Sequence of creation doesn't matter. One week or one eon makes no difference. But if we get hung up on some detail in these stories, we distract ourselves from the really important lessons that they present. We need to read these two accounts, not as scientific fact, but as something more important – truth about God and our relationship with God. When we read these stories as metaphor, we are liberated to find the greater than literal meaning.

One of the lessons here is that the story of God's relationship begins with creation, including the creation of human beings. The story doesn't begin by saying God created Abraham or the nation of Israel. God is not a God of any one people, any one nation, or any one race. We are all the product of God's creation. Many people, many nations, have failed to see that lesson, and have swelled up with pride, inflated their sense of worth to the point of self-righteousness, and then invariably, looked at others around them as inferior, inhuman, and at least unloved, if not damned, by God.

Another lesson is that God is a creative artist who loves her work. It is good, it is good, it is very good – and when we paint over the canvas of creation with our clumsy scrawl, we disrespect God's artistry. It seems apparent that God created because God wanted to create. It wasn't drudgery – it was fun! God loves creation. Wonder of wonders...that includes us! And it includes the soft breeze on your cheek, the whisper of the wind through the spruce and pine trees, the smell of spring flowers, the roar of surf and waterfalls, and the aerial dance of hummingbirds seeking nectar.

We're created in God's image and we need to celebrate and develop our own creativity. The arts are not a frivolous option in life. They're an essential part of what makes us human and in God's image. We're fed at some deep level by beauty in any and all of its expressions. And when we sing or paint or write or dance or cook or garden or do any creative thing, we're acting from our very inmost being.

One more lesson from these creation stories is that God has entrusted us with the care of his artistic work. What a heavy responsibility! But also, what an honor! We need to regain a sense of awe for the property we've been given to care for. And we need to feel both the weight of our stewardship and the great love that has placed us as stewards of creation. Amen.

Sisters and Brothers,

Our God is the God of all people and all creation.

God loves creation – and so must we!

It is important that we nurture the image of God within us, especially creativity.

Our stewardship of creation is both a large responsibility and a great honor.