

God Creates Humankind In Own Image

(Genesis 1:26-2:3; Romans 1:19-20; Matthew 8:1-3, 5-10)

What would you think if you opened up the *Kansas City Star* today and saw as the major headline what's on your bulletin this morning? **God Creates Humankind In Own Image**. Would you think, Oh, that's old news?

Well, it is old news. It describes something that happened a long, long time ago. How long ago has never been agreed upon. According to Hinduism, creation occurred 155 trillion years ago, but according to radiometric dating, four and a half billion years ago. According to the Byzantine Church, creation occurred in 5509 BCE; according to the Mayan civilization, 3114 BCE; and according to Judaism, 3760 BCE. But by any calendar, creation happened a long, long time ago. It is indeed old news.

But nonetheless, whenever it happened, it remains good news. Thus, we do well to periodically go back to *Genesis*, back to our beginnings, and remind ourselves of the good news we find there.

In the creation story, we certainly find good news about the character of our God. God chose to reveal himself through creating. And God delighted in creating. At each stage of creation, God stepped back, looked at what he had created, and was really very pleased with it all. And notice that God didn't bully creation into existence. He didn't coerce it. He said, "Let there be light" and not "There shall be light!" From the beginning, God permitted his creation to enjoy freedom.

Just look at the freedom he gave in humankind. He shared his own glory by creating us in his own image. And he even made us coworkers with him. He gave us responsibilities in caring for the creation he so delighted in. He trusted us with his creation. He allowed us to name all the other living creatures, giving us "dominion" over them.

Let's take a little license for a moment, and picture God anthropomorphically, in human terms. God could have stayed off by himself, wrapped up in himself, keeping his power and his love all to himself, not daring to risk. But God decided to give of himself, to risk himself, to give of his goodness and power by creating. And when he created, he didn't

regret it or try to control it. He thoroughly enjoyed this giving of himself, this creating--turning chaos into order and beauty--giving life to all kinds of grasses, trees, birds, fishes, animals, humans. Just picture God smiling and clapping his hands in joy as he listens to the different songs of the different birds, as he sees the green grass blowing in the breeze under white puffy clouds in a blue sky, as he sees the wonders and beauty of the world. He's not a control freak. He doesn't have to dominate everything and everyone. He loves his creation enough to give it the gift of freedom. I don't know about you, but I not only love this creating God--I like him. It's good news that God is lovable and likeable, for we can trust this God with our world, our loved ones, our own lives.

But besides the good news about God, we also find in the creation story good news about ourselves. Living in the economic times we're living in, it's easy for us to feel helpless, powerless, and insignificant. But the creation story reminds us that we're not any of these things. In fact, we can make a huge difference, we're powerful, and we're very significant.

According to some other Near Eastern creation stories, human beings were created as servants of the gods, appointed to do work on earth that the gods did not care to do. But in our Biblical creation story, we human beings were created by God not as servants but rather as colleagues or partners (Journey Through The Bible, Year One, p. 9).

God created us humans in his image. Later in the Bible story, we will learn that God doesn't want any images set up as representations of his self. No wonder. Why would he trust his reputation to any image of himself? Why would he want to open the door for any distortions or misrepresentations of himself? Nonetheless, God decided to reveal and portray something of himself in us. This says several things. First, it speaks of the closeness God hopes to have with us human beings. Second, it says how much God thinks of us--so much that he's willing to trust us with his reputation, with his image. Third, it declares God wants us to be his representatives with the rest of creation.

Some scholars think that "having dominion" and "being in the image of God" are two ways of saying the same thing. In the ancient world, a king would put up statues of himself to remind people of his authority. Thus in *Genesis*,

God made us the statues of himself, establishing us as his representatives (Journey Through The Bible, Year One, p. 8).

But the dominion God gives us over the rest of creation isn't limitless. He and he alone is still God. Nor is our dominion to be tyranny or abuse. Rather, us having dominion means more accurately us having lordship, something like the sense in which God is lord. As Gary L. Ball-Kilbourne puts it in his book Genesis, "We are to care for the rest of creation with the same love that God cares for God's human creatures." We're not to exploit but rather to care for God's good creation. "Human beings are to take responsibility, under God, for the health and care of the earth, not simply use its goods without a thought of future generations."

God created us with a purpose. He's given us the authority to represent him, to care for his creation on his behalf, to continue his creative work, to delight in creation as he does. Good news indeed. We're far from helpless, powerless, and insignificant.

What a perfect time of the year for us to realize this. The beginning of a new year. A great time for a new start. The time when we all make new plans--new resolutions. The late Erma Bombeck made some memorable resolutions over the years. She said:

1. I will go to no doctor whose office plants have died.
2. I'm going to follow my husband's suggestion to put a little excitement into my life by living within our budget.
3. I'm going to apply for a hardship scholarship to Weight Watchers.
4. I will never loan my car to anyone I have given birth to.

Our scriptures for today speak of incredible possibilities in this new year. If we will but have the faith of the centurion in today's gospel story, what wonders God will be able to accomplish in and through us in this new year. What wonderful new creations may come as a result!

First, we ourselves can become new creations. Created in God's image, each of us has unrealized potential. Most of us are probably familiar with the Suzuki method of teaching toddlers music. Suzuki, a Japanese teacher, musician, and instrument maker came to realize that children had unlimited potential by watching a giant incubator for thousands of Japanese songbirds

known as larks. Apparently there is only one sound that the tiny songbirds can hear as they break through the shells of their eggs. It's the sound of another lark, a very special adult lark, chosen because of its singing ability.

Suzuki noticed that every little chick that hatched automatically began to copy the master singer lark. However, after a few days, each chick, having started out by purely copying songs, began to develop its own variations on the original Master Song.

"Astounding!" thought Suzuki. "If a bird's tiny, tiny brain can learn so perfectly, then surely the human brain, with its vastly superior abilities, should be able to do the same and better!" This line of reasoning led Suzuki to his next revelation: every Japanese child learns to speak Japanese! When Suzuki pointed this out to his friends they laughed and assured him they already knew that. "But No! No!" declared Suzuki, "they really do, and it's amazing!" Any baby, born in any country, automatically learns, within two years, the language of that country. This means that every normal baby's brain is capable of learning millions of potential languages.

We also have enormous untapped spiritual potential. We don't have to live lives of inner turmoil, bitterness, anger, guilt, hatred, resentment, negativity. We can become new creations! We have the potential to more accurately reflect the God who created us. We have the potential to be much more Christ-like than we already are. We have the potential to become more forgiving, more compassionate, more peaceful, more hopeful, more just, more loving. Try to grasp the significance of this truth. We no longer have to live lives filled with inner conflict, anger, resentment, fear, hatred, guilt, or rejection.

After Nathaniel Hawthorne's death, it was discovered that he had left some notebooks with random ideas he had jotted down as they occurred to him. One entry reads as follows: "Suggestion for a story in which the principal character simply never appears." A rabbi named Sidney Greenberg commented on this by saying, "Unhappily, this is the story of too many lives. The principal character simply never appears. The person we might grow into, the human being we might become, doesn't show up. Our potential greatness lies unrealized, the splendor remains imprisoned, the promise unfulfilled. Our lives develop a static character."

But this doesn't have to happen to us, for God has placed within each of us enormous potential--mental potential, physical potential, and spiritual potential. This year, we can become good stewards of the creation of ourselves that God has entrusted to us. We can continue that process of becoming within ourselves.

And, secondly, we can affect creation beyond ourselves. We can help others become new creations. By the words we speak, by the actions we perform, by the sacrifices we make, by the examples we set, we can bring about ongoing creation in others.

One night a father gathered the family around the kitchen table and told his children, including ten-year-old Tony, that he had given his life to Christ. The father was a rough-living longshoreman in Baltimore, Maryland. He made liquor in his basement. He caused a lot of conflict and strife in the family. But, then, he became a different person, a new creation. He renewed his commitment to love his wife and children, and he initiated family Bible study and prayer. As a result, he created peace and growth in his family. By taking care of his own creation, the father cared for some of the other creations God had entrusted to him, his wife and children, his family. As a result, the man's son, Tony Evans, ended up enrolling at Dallas Theological Seminary and becoming one of America's best-known ministers.

And, thirdly, of course, there is the difference we can make in the environment. We don't have to sit by and bemoan the pollution around us. We weren't created to sit by and bemoan the pollution around us. We were created as coworkers of God, entrusted by him with continuing the wonder and the beauty in which he so delights.

God Creates Humankind In Own Image. Old news--but good news nonetheless. Amen.

-- Terry Chamberlain Diehl; Hickman Mills Community Christian Church; January 24, 2010