

## **Stories of Creation**

(Genesis 1:1-5, 26-28; 2:4b-7, 15-22; John 1:1-18; Revelation 4:8-11)

Adam was moping around the Garden of Eden. So God asked him, "What's wrong?" Adam said he didn't have anyone to talk to. God smiled and told Adam that he would make him a companion. God said, "This pretty lady will gather food for you, cook for you, and when you discover clothing, she will wash it for you. She will always agree with every decision you make, and she will not nag you, and will always be the first to admit she was wrong when you have a disagreement. She will praise you, and she will bear your children and never ask you to get up in the middle of the night to take care of them." Adam was impressed. So he asked God, "Wow. What will a woman like this cost?" God replied, "An arm and a leg." Adam thought a minute, and then asked, "What can I get for a rib?"

There are lots of jokes about creation. Even the Bible has quite a few stories about creation.

There are those ancient, primitive words in which God is portrayed in anthropomorphic language, in other words, as a human being: "In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens...the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:4b-14).

Then there's the more sophisticated, poetic words with which the Bible begins. "In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 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. Then God said, 'Let there be light;' and there was light. And God saw that the light was good..." (Genesis 1:1-4). And these beautiful words continue, telling us that on the sixth day, "...God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion,,,,'" (Genesis 1:27-28).

And elsewhere in the Bible there are other creation stories, but a major one is found at the beginning of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the

beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:1-5).

The presence of so many creation stories in the Bible tells us that their message is a very important one. And even though they vary somewhat, if we step back, their message is consistent: God created the universe and everything in it.

It's unfortunate that nowadays, when the creation stories are talked about, they're usually talked about in conjunction with a conflict with science. But there really doesn't have to be a conflict here. For I personally can believe all the scientific theories, and still believe the message of the Bible's creation stories: "in the beginning, God....." -- God created the universe and everything in it.

And this message, as well as all the messages of all the Bible stories, isn't just about history. In other words, the message of the stories of creation isn't just that God created the universe and everything in it---thousands and thousands of years ago. The message of the creation stories, you see, is extremely relevant to our day-to-day living.

First, the truth that God created the universe and everything in it makes a difference in our day-to-day lives because it means that everything and everyone belong to God. This means that every moment of every day, we should be awestruck with the God who created the earth we walk upon, the air we breathe, the seasons we pass through, the sky, the stars, the rain, the flowers and trees, the people, we ourselves. Everything has the touch of the Creator God upon it.

John Killinger stated it well: "If the mystery is everywhere, then we ought to be falling to our knees everywhere to worship. If the heart of the mystery is here and here and here, then we must be careful not to be arrogant before it or to claim its rights. In short, we've not been given the authority to handle any life casually--not the life of the prisoner who has been found guilty of murder; not the lives of the people in the trajectories of our missiles.... If mystery is everywhere, then life itself is sacred..... And

thus we should have a proper sense of ourselves in relationship to the Creator."

It is said that when President Roosevelt entertained diplomatic guests at the White House, at the end of the day, he would take them out to the back lawn. And the president would stand, just gazing at the night sky, so that soon all other eyes followed his and also looked heavenward at the magnificent display of God's sparkling creation. Then after a long moment, President Roosevelt would say, "Gentlemen, I believe we are small enough now. Let's go to bed."

William Sloan Coffin, one of my favorite modern theologians, understood the importance of us walking humbly with our Creator. Coffin said, "We have learned to soar through the air like birds, to swim through the seas like fish, to soar through space like comets. Now it is high time we learned to walk the earth as the children of our God."

Until we can do this, until we can walk the earth humbly as children of God, until we can open our senses and appreciate God and our relationship with him, we will be dissatisfied with our lives, feel empty inside, be incomplete. As Augustine said, "God has made us for himself, and our souls are restless until they rest in him."

In 2008, Christian recording artist Steven Curtis Chapman and his family suffered a horrible loss. Chapman's five-year-old daughter was struck and killed when Chapman's seventeen-year-old son backed his SUV out of the family's driveway. After his daughter's death, Chapman reconsidered the words to all his songs and whether he could still sing—and believe—them. One song, though, that spoke to him more than ever and helped him endure the pain was his song "Yours." Chapman said, "In this song, in particular, I had to come to a new realization. There's not an inch of creation that God doesn't look at and say 'all of that's mine.'" As a result of this realization, Chapman added a new verse to "Yours:"

I've walked the valley of death's shadow  
so deep and dark that I could barely breathe.  
I've had to let go of more than I could bear and  
I've questioned everything that I believe.  
Still even here in this great darkness

a comfort and a hope comes breaking through  
as I can say in life or death  
God we belong to you.

Second, the truth that God created the universe and everything in it makes a difference in our day-to-day lives because it means that the God of creation is a creating God. This is clear as we thumb through the pages of our Bibles. Through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God was busy creating a special relationship with humanity. In the Exodus, God was creating a nation. In the Exile, God was creating a second chance for his people. Through Jesus, God was creating redemption. God was creating during the Reformation. God is creating today. He's working to bring order out of chaos, to bring light into darkness, to bless relationships, to bring about that which he can pronounce "good." He's constantly working to create justice, compassion, forgiveness, hope, peace, community, love. He's at work in our world, in our nation, in our cities, in our communities, and in our lives--in your life and in mine.

So, every time we look in the mirror, we should think, "God's not finished with me yet." God knows us and loves us. He knows our insecurities, our weaknesses, our strengths, our problems, our needs. Because he is our Creator, he knows how to fix us. Years ago, an owner of a Model T car was parked along a road because his car had broken down. The driver didn't know how to fix the car. But luckily, another car came by, and the car's driver stopped and offered to help. Before too long, the stranger had the car fixed and running. The owner was amazed. "How did you know how to fix it?" he asked. And the stranger replied, "I knew how to fix it because I'm the man who built it. My name is Henry Ford."

Similarly, our Maker knows how to fix us when we've broken down. And no matter how many times we may disappoint him with our choices, because he's a gracious Creator, he never turns his back on us, giving up on us.

So every time we feel discouraged or hopeless, we can find comfort and encouragement in remembering, "God's not finished with me yet." And we can find peace in joining the ancient Psalmist in praying, "Create in me a clean heart, God" (Psalm 51). We need to embrace the promise the Apostle Paul spoke of to the Corinthians--that it's never too late for us to become "new creations."

Third, the truth that God created the universe and everything in it makes a difference in our day-to-day lives because it means that we can and should live our lives as God's instruments in his ongoing creative process.

I remember a story I read about two women who were visiting over a cup of tea. One woman tearfully spoke of feeling empty, undervalued, exhausted, disillusioned, weary, and angry. She spoke of having to fight hard for what she wants. The other woman listened until there was silence. Then she offered her hurting friend an observation from Dorothy Sayers: "Life is not a problem to be solved, but a medium for creation." And then she suggested, "Perhaps it is time to drop your sword and pick up your paint brush."

All too often we live our lives as if we're holding a sword. We keep people at arm's length. We're suspicious and guarded. We protect our privacy. We come out fighting. We're even at war within ourselves, unhappy with ourselves or with our lives. But how different our lives are when we put down our sword and see people and situations and circumstances and ourselves as canvasses--opportunities--for new creation. How different our lives are when we join the Psalmist in praying, "May the beauty of the Lord our God rest upon us and establish the work of our hands" (Psalm 90:17).

In the fourth century, a priest named Gregory was appointed by the bishop, who happened to be his brother, to go to a very small town called Nyssa in central Turkey. Gregory didn't want to go--it was too small a place. But he went, and he took with him not a sword but a paint brush. Gregory understood that even at this wide spot in the road, he could be God's instrument in bringing about creation. So, even in little Nyssa, Gregory grew to be one of the greatest theologians of the church. He helped shape the understanding of the Trinity, as well as the infinite nature of God and the finite nature of humankind.

Singer and actress Mary Martin used to talk about her grandmother. She said that her grandmother was young at heart and interested in everyone and everything around her until she died in her 90s. Mary Martin described her grandmother as always being in a state of "incandescent amazement."

Isn't that a wonderful way to be described? "Incandescent amazement." Incandescent! Lit up! Thus adding more of God's creative light! Amazement! How wonderful to live our lives always aware of the wonder of God's

creation, always aware of the wonder of God's ongoing creating, always aware of the wonder of God using us as his instruments in creating! How wonderful to understand that our very lives are meant to be stories of creation! Amen.

-- Terry Chamberlain Diehl; Hickman Mills Community Christian Church; October 11,2009