

## The Creation Story

Sunday June 4  
Genesis 1:1-2:4a

Before I begin today's sermon I would like to apologize. When last I was with you on May 21<sup>st</sup>, I shared that I had just taken in the Festival of homiletics, a preaching conference in the United States. I attended the conference via the Internet - I listened to 10 or so inspirational sermons and heard five lectures on the art of preaching. The sermons were offered by a variety of excellent preachers, some of whom have Baptist roots and whose skin is much darker than mine. These preachers have a unique style of preaching and their passion and energy for the Word is contagious and so I promised that this Sunday I would provide a little fire and brimstone. However - this sermon is less fire and brimstone and more... something else ..and I'll let you figure that out. So, I'm sorry Jim if you have been practicing your "amen sister" and "hallelujahs".

I offer this reflection, honest to my style and with all the passion for the word I can muster this day. Perhaps next week I will find the fire and brimstone.

**Would you pray with me:** God of ancient story and present moment may the words I offer in reflection, be acceptable to you and reflect your wisdom in this day. Amen.

I think children come by it honestly, I love to watch the kids from the preschool here at McClure leave with their caregivers after a busy morning of learning and fun. The other day, dismissal came right after a heavy rain and the lucky kids had caregivers who allowed them to jump in every puddle on their way to the car. Some kids were even allowed to stop and check out the worms that had surfaced along the road. The appreciation for what creation has to offer comes naturally to children.

When I was in elementary school my appreciation for creation was inspired by the principle of the school and my science teacher, Gordon Taylor – yep the same Gordon Taylor that lives at McClure Place. Mr. Taylor taught the standard elementary school class on photosynthesis. He was such a gifted teacher that he had me checking out trees and plants along my 3 block walk home every day.

I think it would be safe to say that many of us are fascinated with the world around us. For some the stars and planets and the mathematics of the heavens and questions about an ever-expanding universe have them marveling at creation. Others are fascinated by the complete opposite end of things - it is the inner workings of the atom or the biological cell that really gets them humming. Others might find those things boring, or too mind boggling to ponder. These might find themselves captivated by creatures, perhaps by a pet who somehow knows to snuggle closer when they're feeling blue. There are those who are calmed by the setting sun or empowered by the rising sun or who drift away into a place of safety and relaxation while watching the twinkling of the stars. The natural world, creation astounds us, perplexes us, and enchants us.

Ancient people were no different than us. Life may have been simpler, a little slower, and a lot less digital, way back then but people of biblical times share the same types of wonder about the world around them as we do. And they created stories about it. Stories that made space for mystery, belief, and faith. Unlike all the other stories that all the other people were telling about the unfolding of creation, this one

found in Genesis, told of one God that created everything with order and meaning. Creation was no accident. Rather in this story we discover that creation has been the work of a unique God, a God who never removes God self from creation, and who loves it deeply. In fact this God loves creation so deeply, that this God becomes a part of it by creating humans who bear the creator's image.

This creation story, one of several found in the Bible, which has been foundational for many through out history has been both gift and curse. The challenging part of this story lies in a verse which seems completely out of place – verse 28. The writer puts these words in God's mouth “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.” It is odd because in previous passages of the story God speaks and creation happens – this is the only verse that has instructions – even the concluding verses are not instructive but rather affirming of the gift that creation is.

One might argue that this one little verse about humanity's task - to subdue and have dominion over - has woven its way into our western thinking and we have made a mess of things as a result.

I have been reading a book called Braiding Sweetgrass: indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the teachings of plants by Robin Wall Kimmerer; a mother, scientist, professor and Citizen of Potawatomi Nation. I have been reading Braiding Sweetgrass for several years, not because it is a big thick book but because it is heavy with learnings for me. I have read it carefully and thoughtfully I have read it and reread it and read it again. Allow me to share a short passage from it for you.

Robin writes: I sat once in a graduate writing workshop on relationships to the land. The students all demonstrated a deep respect and affectionate for nature. They said that nature was the place where they experienced the greatest sense of belonging and well-being. They professed, without reservation that they loved the earth. And then I asked them do you think that the earth loves you back? No one was willing to answer that. It was as if I had brought a two headed porcupine into the classroom. Unexpectedly. Prickly. They backed slowly away. Here was a room full of writers, passionately wallowing in unrequited love of nature.

So I made it hypothetical and asked, what do you suppose would happen if people believed this crazy notion that the earth loved them back? The floodgates opened. They all wanted to talk at once. They were suddenly off the deep end, heading for World Peace and perfect harmony.

One student summed it up: “You wouldn't harm what gives you love.”

Knowing that you love the earth changes you, activates you to defend and protect and celebrate. But when you feel that *the earth loves you* in return, that feeling transforms the relationship from a one-way street into a sacred bond.

Robin continues: My daughter Linden grows one of my favorite gardens in the world. She brings up all kinds of good things to eat from her thin mountain soil, things I can only dream of, like tomatillos and chili. She makes compost and flowers, but the best part isn't the plants. It's that she phones me to chat while she weeds. We water and weed and harvest, visiting happily as we did when she was a girl despite the 3000 miles

between us. Linden is immensely busy, and so I asked her why she gardens, given how much time it takes.

She does it for the food and the satisfaction of hard work yielding something so prolific, she says. And it makes her feel at home in a place, to have her hands in the earth. I asked her, do you love your garden? Even though I already know the answer. But then I ask, tentatively, do you feel that your garden loves you back? She is quiet for a minute; she's never glib about such things. I am certain of it she says my garden takes care of me like my own Mama. I can die happy. (pg 124-125)

How different our world might be if we believed that the world was not something for us to subdue and dominate but rather something that we are to love because it loves us.

How do we treat those that love us?

- We spend time with them and listen to their stories. We get to know them.
- We are respectful because we know that our words and actions can wound.
- We are honest because the relationship creates such a safe place we can be all that God has called us to be and to be dishonest would choke the sacredness of the love.
- We delight in the other, giving thanks for the company and the joy of connection.
- In loving relationships we sometimes let go of our own needs for the sake of the other which might look like sacrifice but does not feel like sacrifice at all.
- In loving relationships we are comfort for the other and cheerleader of new growth.

It makes sense to me that our God would create a place for you and I that loves us. The challenge is to love creation back.

Let us rewrite the story of our relationship with creation so that our children and grandchildren will continue to splash in puddles, watch the worms wiggle and be inspired by the next generations of amazing teachers who will show how photosynthesis works and open the beauty of our divine soaked world.

Amen.