**“The Story of Creation”**

Genesis 1:1-5, 26-27, 31; Genesis 2:4b-9, 15

Have you ever heard of a mashup song? A mashup song is made by mashing two songs together. The artist will sing a couple of verses from one song, and then smoothly switch over and start singing a few verses of another song. And if the artist is really good, you won’t even notice the switch. Well, this morning’s Call to Worship is a mashup scripture reading. And the artist who wrote this poem was so good and switched back and forth so smoothly, you might not have noticed it.

In our Call to Worship, creation begins in total darkness, “Blacker than a hundred midnights; Down in a cypress swamp.” And the first act of creation is light, then the creation of the sun and moon and the stars; rain and seas and rivers; vegetation; animals; and last but certainly not least humanity in God’s own image. And over and over again we hear the refrain, “That’s good! That’s good! That’s good!” Well, this is the order of creation found in our first scripture reading from Genesis one.

But within this order of creation, we hear the image of God smiling, and walking, and batting his eyes and clapping his hands. And perhaps most importantly God creates because God is lonely. Well, this is the God of creation we hear in our second scripture reading from Genesis two. That’s why I call it a mashup Call to Worship.

There are major differences between the Creation Story told in chapter one of Genesis and the Creation Story we hear in chapter two. The God described in chapter one comes across as very grand, distant, and orderly. This is a God of awe and mystery and wonder. All this God has to do to create is simply to speak, and it is so. And a voice is all we witness of the God in chapter one, a bodiless distant but all-powerful voice. And there’s order and reason and method in this story. Day one leads into day two, and day two leads into day three. And there is evening and there is morning, and then we’re on to day four. And it is all very good!

But the story we hear in chapter two is quite different. Like the God we experience in our Call to Worship, this God is very near and very personal. Like a potter forming clay, this God reaches his hand down into the dirt and carefully and caringly forms that first human with God’s own hands. And then God lovingly breathes the very wind right out of God’s lungs, giving life to the soul of humanity. And in chapter three this God seeks to walk with the man and woman in the garden, and this God seems very concerned when they are nowhere to be found. This is a God who seems to be looking for a relationship.

Why two stories describing two very different natures of the God we worship and serve? Well, I might as well ask: Why four different Gospel stories about Jesus? You see, the nature and reality of the God we worship and serve is so vast and deep and wide, it takes multiple stories to even begin scratching the surface. So, let’s take a moment and pay real close attention to these two stories of creation and make sure we recognize the similarities and differences.

One similarity between both stories is that our God is absolutely the God of creation; therefore, in both stories, the physical world that surrounds us is not only good, it’s very good! According to chapter two, God created our world with colors pleasing to the eye and wonderful flavors pleasing to the tongue. And God gave a name to God’s created world, or at least a part of God’s world. God named it Eden which literally means “fertility,” “luxury,” and “delight.” God’s intention for our world, God’s intention for you and me is for us to enjoy life and to experience appropriate pleasures in moderation without hording so that all of humanity can enjoy the delights of God’s creation.

You see, the physical world in its created essence is not evil. Chapter one makes this point crystal clear with the repeating refrain, “It is good. It is good. It is very good!” Why? Because God created it. And that includes you and me. As the saying goes, “God don’t make no junk.” According to today’s two stories, you and I and all of God’s creation are God’s work of art—God’s masterpiece.

The second similarity is that in both chapters one and two our God is the source of every blessing. In our scripture readings, we hear that God is the source of our very life and being. In chapter one, God speaks, and humanity is created. In chapter two, God breathes into us the very breath of life; God gave life to your soul. For as our story proclaims: “And the [human] became a living being.”

But while the two stories do include similarities, there are significant differences. As I’ve already pointed out, the God of chapter one is distant and all-powerful, while the God of chapter two is personal and intimate. The God of chapter two expresses concern for the emotional welfare of humanity. “It is not good for a human to be alone.” We are made for relationships. We are designed to live in communion with others, mutually helping and supporting each other. In Chapter two, God made a partner for Adam. But in chapter one, God speaks and creates humanity all at once, male and female, in the image of God, and in chapter one God creates humanity for a purpose—to have dominion over all of God’s creation.

Years ago, I heard a troubling interpretation of this God-given purpose for humanity. I was serving my first church in the ministry, a small congregation on an agricultural island about 30 minutes south of downtown Charleston, South Carolina. I was the first full-time pastor the church had ever called. Before calling me, they couldn’t afford to pay the salary of a full-time minister, and, after calling me, let’s just say there wasn’t a lot of wiggle room in the budget. It seemed to me there was an unspoken urgency for the church to grow.

Soon after I arrived, a young couple with two children started visiting our church, and like most congregations, this really got people excited. If we could get them to join, maybe that would be the start of bringing in more young people. Well, during a Bible study on Genesis One, the husband and father of this young family expressed his understanding of the word “Dominion.” He said it meant something akin to domination. He said that God gave the world and everything in it to mankind, and we can do whatever we want with it. Then he went on to explain that Jesus was going to return any day now, so it really doesn’t matter if we pollute the air or if animals go extinct. Well, I felt I had no choice but to be politely clear about my understanding of the word “Dominion,” and that’s the last we ever saw of this family.

Do you remember earlier in this sermon when I asked why are there two stories of creation in the Bible? Well, in chapter two, we hear another purpose God had in creating humankind. In this beautiful, healthy, thriving garden, God placed humankind—not to exploit, hoard, or selfishly over-indulge in all the pleasures of Eden—but instead, we are to till it and keep God’s garden. We are the caretakers of God’s garden. Our purpose is to ensure that God’s garden remains beautiful and healthy and thriving. And notice how I said that—God’s garden. “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world and those who live in it.” (Ps. 24:1) That’s what the Psalmist says.

Folks, “Dominion” is not the right of domination. In light of all of scripture, dominion of the earth is more like the biblical understanding of stewardship. We are not the kings and queens who hold dominion over all the land. God’s creation still belongs to God. We are simply the stewards, the caretakers of the land, responsible to God for the land’s welfare. “Dominion” is the responsibility to nurture and care and protect the beauty of God’s creation and to delight in it.

But over and over again throughout the stories of scripture and in the history of our world, we humans exploit our neighbors and the world in which we live, and we now find ourselves living in a time where we humans can even threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care. In the words of A Brief Statement of Faith, “In sovereign love, God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God’s image…to live as one community. But we rebel against God; we hide from our creator…accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.” (Book of Confessions, 11.29-38)

But the Good News of our faith is that this is not the only story found in scripture. Over and over and over again, we also hear the story of God reaching out to redeem, to rescue, and forgive. Over and over and over again, God refuses to give up on us. And as the words of A Brief Statement of Faith continue, we hear, “Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.”

Theologians have a lot of different understandings and interpretations of the Biblical proclamation that humanity is created in the image of God, and maybe there are multiple meanings of this statement. But one interpretation I really like is that being created in the image of God means we are created with God’s creating nature. We are created with the ability to see and understand the big picture of nature, and to understand our effect upon nature, and with the ability to make appropriate and necessary changes in the way we live in and affect God’s creation.

Now I realize that in a congregation as large as ours, we have different opinions on these understandings. That’s okay. In the same way we need four Gospels and two creation stories, we can challenge and correct each other with different points of view. But the one constant belief we all must share is that we are called to work for the welfare of God’s creation—to till it and keep it—because that’s what the Bible says.

My friends, on this Earth Care Sunday, let us dedicate ourselves and the ministry of our church to be good stewards of God’s creation because this is God’s world. So let us glorify God by nurturing the beauty, the health, and the splendor of God’s good and glorious creation.

Let us pray:

Gracious and loving and merciful creator, thank you for all the blessings of your creation. Thank you for the air we breathe and the food we eat. Thank you for all the wonders of your creation. Help us, O Lord, to live our lives in gratitude and commitment to live as your joyful servants now and forever. May we live our lives in moderation and simplicity, so all your children can enjoy the blessings of your good creation and delight in it. Amen.

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