

CREATED ANEW: God Created. Now What?

Genesis 1:1-5

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I.

I traveled to central Oklahoma in September with three of our Missions Leadership Team members to explore future mission opportunities with indigenous Native American congregations. Our last stop before returning home was the First Americans Museum in Oklahoma City. In this modern indigenous museum, visitors experience the collective histories of 39 distinctive First American Nations in Oklahoma today.

It is a creative and beautifully designed museum whose leading exhibition begins with the 270-degree Origins Theater. This theatre presents four tribal Origin Stories scripted, narrated, and animated by Native community members. According to their genesis or creation stories, some tribes came from the earth, some from the sky, and some from the water.

Creation narratives give a culture life by designating a beginning and a history. They explain the universe and define the meaning of existence. Cultures retell their genesis stories for several reasons – to help them understand who they are, how things came to be, what they value and believe, and how they should continue to live based on all these things.

But it is important to remember these stories of origin are not historical or scientific reports and were never meant to be. They are, instead, poetic and metaphorical. They give meaning and purpose to what is unknown, not with facts but with narratives.

Every ancient and modern culture has a creation story because humans are people of wonder, curiosity, and creativity. While we now know far more about the cosmos than ancient cultures, there is much we are still learning. We're fascinated by the world around us, beyond us, and within us. Our fascination might be with the endless mystery of the cosmos. But we also find ourselves in wonder about the composition of a song, poem, or story that makes us feel things we didn't know we could feel. We might be fascinated by the brush strokes on a canvas, the beauty of a face, the burst of flavors in a meal, or the brilliance of an idea or concept that helps us transcend the moments. Wonder and curiosity keep us engaged in the world around us. It's part of what makes us human.

II.

The Hebrew people were also people of wonder, curiosity, and creativity. They, too, had genesis or creation stories about the world around them, where they came from, and what the point of life was as the people of God. Much like there is more than one Gospel account in the Bible, there is more than one creation account. We read one this morning from Genesis 1. There is another in Genesis 2. All the major details in the two creation narratives are similar, but how the story unfolds is quite different. The first is more rigid. It lays out creation in a nice and neat list.

The second jumbles the order and turns the details into a more dramatic narrative. These two accounts give us a unique look into the shared origin stories of Judaism and Christianity. These accounts are not historical or scientific reports. If we try to use these passages like that, we'll make strange conclusions about how the earth works that put us at odds with what we learned in science class. The Bible isn't trying to teach us about matter, mass, evolution, biology, and chemistry. The Bible is a collection of stories about God and God's people. The beauty of the creation story is not found so much in the details but rather in the overarching story about who the Creator is and who we are in response to that Creator.

III.

In the beginning was a God who chose to create, like a divine artist. Amid the disorder that existed, God spoke, and creation unfolded. God brought forth order and light. With intention, the Creator God set the stage for life to flourish and thrive. God created... God said... God saw... God called... God made... God blessed... God rested. These seven action verbs highlight that God acted intentionally. God is not a passive observer but an active, creative force behind it all, and still is. The creation stories teach us this about God.

They also teach us that while God created without the help of other gods, unlike most other origin stories of the ancient world, God chose to make space for co-creators like you and me.

Nadia Bolz-Weber compares God to a kind-faced woman on the subway who takes her handbag onto her lap so that there's room for you to sit next to her. She didn't have to do it, but that's just who she is; the kind-faced subway lady's nature is that she makes room for others. God's nature is that God scoots over and makes room for us to co-create with God. If you continue reading chapter one, we learn God creates with the intent that all God's creation will join in the creation process.

"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.... And God saw that it was good." (vv.11-12)

"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." God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." (vv. 20, 22-23)

Then God had a crazy explosion of creativity and made animals. Platypus, Cockatiels, Narwhals, Sloths, and Dogs, God's greatest animal.

Then God said, "Let us create humans in our own image and likeness." So, God who chooses community, God who is relational, God the opposite of isolation, this God created every one of us in the image of God, formed from dust and the very breath of God. And while everything else was declared good, we were declared VERY GOOD, the crowning piece of God's creative work.

God chose not to create alone. God scoots over and makes space for creation to join the creation process. Creation like you and me.

After the first six days of creation are done in Genesis 1, each day ends with the phrase, "There was evening and morning." Each day had an ending to it, except for the seventh day. On the seventh day, the phrase does not appear. "On the sixth day, God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation." (vv. 2-3)

The seventh day has no end. The seventh day is ongoing and still happening. God rested or now fully dwells with us because God wants to be in relationship with us. From the beginning of time, it has been about Emmanuel, God with us. That is God's desire because God loves us.

With us is God's resting place. God is not napping on the seventh day. God is abiding and ruling and creating. God is presently and always ruling over all creation, bringing God's order to disorder. God is sharing creation with us so we might dwell with God and create with God together forever. God has scooted over because that is who God is, a relational God. God made us in God's image so we might join God in creating the world as God dreams it to be, bringing God's order to the disorder.

IV.

But the world isn't as God dreams it to be, right? We're all painfully aware of this. We've chosen our order over God's order, and it has made a mess of things. Creation is broken. Relationships are broken. How we treat the planet and people are anything but good. And often, when we are called to account for the pain we cause, we utter in our defense, "Well, I'm only human."

But to be human was never meant to be an excuse or pass for being less than what God created us to be. To be human means to remember our Creator calls us very good, God's crowning achievement, made in God's image. To be human means to remember our purpose is partnering with God in making the world as God dreams it to be. To be human was never meant to justify making the world less than God dreams it to be. Then, Emmanuel, God with us through Jesus of Nazareth, shows us what it means to be a human who partners with God in bringing order to disorder, light to darkness, and hope to despair.

V.

There is a third account of creation in the first chapter of John's Gospel. It reads, "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 overtake it." (John 1:1-5)

In the beginning, when God's Spirit hovered over the waters, when God brought order to disorder, and when God spoke all of creation into being, Christ, the Word, was present. Then,

the Word made flesh, Jesus, entered our world to save and restore us and bring order to disorder. Just like the voice of God hovers above the waters in the creation stories, the voice of God hovers above the waters when Jesus is baptized and the heavens open, the Spirit descends, and “a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.” Jesus’s ministry began, and he walked among us, teaching us who the Creator God is and what it means to be human, to be image-bearers of this God, created anew, and good-news people through the work of the Spirit.

God is still creating. And God is still scooting over to make room for us, for you and me, for the broken-hearted and the hard-hearted. For the politicians down the street and the people who love their drink. For the tired mommas and the empty nesters. For the anxious-minded and the aimless wanderers. For the full-of-pride and the ones who believe they are never enough. For those with a home and those far from home. God makes room for us all.

One author remarked, “Like a mother hen brooding over her nest waiting for life to spring forth, God’s spirit hovered over the waters. The good news is that God’s spirit still hovers over the formless void of broken lives and the great darkness in which the marginalized find themselves.”

VI.

God rests with us. God desires to be in relationship with us. God is still actively creating, redeeming, and making space for us to partner with God, each in our unique way, thanks to the ever-present Spirit. We have been created in God's image so we might participate in God’s dream of a renewed world. We’ve been redeemed by the Son of God so that we might bring God’s order to the disorder.

Maybe it is as simple as being a kind-faced woman on the subway who takes her handbag onto her lap so that there’s room for another to sit next to her.

Maybe it is as challenging as making space for those who have been kept from the tables of justice to have a place next to you at the table.

It may start small in your own life where disorder is present and in need of God’s order. It may be in a relationship or place where the waters of disorder need order. A place where a group of believers join hands with God and each other to bring light to the darkness. Through acts of love and compassion, they became bearers of God's creative energy, joining in the ongoing creation process.

God created. Now what? We dwell with God and create with God. Our lives are part of the ongoing narrative of creation, which unfolds with every act of love, kindness, and justice. How can our creativity reflect the divine image within us? How will we actively participate in the ongoing creation story for the glory of God and the good of the world?

PRAYER

For a few moments, I invite you to close your eyes and reflect silently on these questions as we practice the presence of God together.

- Where are you encountering or feeling disorder in your life? What robs you of a sense of peace? Maybe there is disorder in a relationship. Perhaps you have a daily habit or practice introducing disorder into your day. Where do you encounter disorder in your daily life? Take a few moments to reflect on this question.
- What can you do to bring even a little order to a disordered space in your life? Is it creating more space in your day by turning off some of the noise or distractions that create disorder? Is it less time on social media or listening to the news? Is it praying to God or making time for a person you value? Is it adding silence to the beginning and end of your day where you sit before God as the Spirit reminds you that you are God's beloved? How will you partner with God practically and intentionally this week to create a space of order? Take a few moments to reflect on this question.

Prayer:

Creator God, we are grateful that you bring order to places of disorder. Help us partner with You to bring order to the disordered spaces of our lives and this world. And as we do, may we cultivate an attentiveness to Your loving presence with us. Amen.

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All scripture quoted is from the NRSVUE unless otherwise noted.