

Sermon for Sunday, September 7, 2025

Genesis 1:1-2:4a

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Today marks the beginning of a new program year with all kinds of activities starting: All Ages & Stages Bible Study, Sunday School, Family Fun Night and a little later Confirmation. It's a time of renewed energy and hopefully eagerness to learn. Today also marks the day when we begin a new year of the narrative lectionary with a look at the familiar creation story from Genesis 1.

You might wonder what is a lectionary? A lectionary is a list of Bible readings to be heard and studied and preached on during worship. There are lots of different kinds of lectionaries. Here at Vasa we use one called the Narrative Lectionary. We do so because its primary purpose is to give us a four year cycle of readings from the gospels. Year one: Matthew, year two: Mark, year three: Luke and year four: John. These gospel readings typically begin after Christmas. In the fall months we hear Old Testament readings that will prepare us for the upcoming gospel. This fall we will hear OT readings that will prepare us for the gospel of John that we will begin reading on December 28th.

Today's OT reading is arguably the most well known of the creation stories in the Bible, but it is not the only creation story. Chapter 2 of Genesis contains a second story. One could argue that the opening verses of John's gospel are also a creation story. John's story does not go into details about "how" God created but rather affirms that Jesus was present as "the Word" was spoken through which all creation was made.

The way this sermon will work is that my reader: Mark, is going to read a portion of the lesson from Genesis. I will make some comments, and then he will read again: back and forth. Let us now begin at the beginning with the creation story as it is written in Genesis 1.

Genesis 1:1 - 2:4 In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 2 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. 3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day,

and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

There is an ancient Hebrew word: *ruach* which can mean wind or breath or spirit. So it is possible to rewrite a portion of verse 2 to say, "a breath from God swept over the face of the waters." Or perhaps "the Spirit of God swept over the face of the waters." God was present and God spoke. It was through God's speaking that light was created. Notice that it doesn't necessarily say that God created the darkness, it just says that God gave the darkness a name.

Two other brief comments: there is no mention of sun, moon, or stars providing the light. God hasn't created those celestial objects yet and will not do so until the fourth day.

Secondly notice that once God has created there is a pause. "There was evening and there was morning, the first day." Not a complete day of rest: as in Sabbath, rather a pause/break in God's creative activity. It's almost as if God is an artist and steps back to examine what has been created to determine whether there are any improvements to be made. In this case we are told that God saw that the light was good.

6 And God said, "Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." 7 So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. 8 God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

9 And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. 11 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. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

Every one of us is a theologian. We can be called theologians because they are simply people who read the Scripture and think about its meaning. That's us; that's what we do. As the ancient

theologians tell the creation story, dry land appears when God gathers together all of the waters "under the sky." The next step is for vegetation to appear: plants and trees with great abundance. The vegetation is "called forth" from the earth, almost as if the earth; the soil is a partner in the creative process; or perhaps God created the seeds that had lain dormant in the earth and now, with dry land appearing, the conditions are just right for the seeds to begin to grow. And they do.

14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so. 16 God made the two great lights-- the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night-- and the stars. 17 God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, 18 to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

At last we have celestial objects: sun, moon, and stars created! I cannot explain why the ancient theologians waited until the fourth day to explain that God created these objects....if I had been asked, I would have done it in a different order, but I wasn't asked. The most important point is that, especially for ancient people, the sun, moon, and stars, are a way to measure time. Sunrise and sunset define days. The cycle of the moon defines a month. And taken together the recurring cycles help to define growing seasons and "years." Now I'm not necessarily saying that God creates "time" but I am saying that in the minds of the ancient theologians God has created a way to *measure or mark* time.

20 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." 21 So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." 23 And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

24 And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. 25 God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and

everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

There has been a rhythm to this reading from Genesis thus far. It would be easy for us to mentally extend this rhythm and, as the reader pauses at the end of verse 26 to say, "And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day and God saw that it was good." But that's not how this story is told.

Day six is when humans are created. In verse 26 God says "Let us make humankind in *our* image, according to *our* likeness." Plural. Why plural? This story of the creation is very old and the writers of this story thought of God as the supreme being over a multitude of lesser gods. It's important to understand this because there are a few other places in the Old Testament that refer to a "divine council." These passages simply hearken back to this ancient understanding. Yes, we could think of the plural as pointing toward the Trinity but that was not what the ancient theologians were thinking when they wrote this story. I emphasize that in their minds the members of the divine council had less power. Christians believe that Jesus was and is equal with God the creator. Three in one and one in three.

27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "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." 29 God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was VERY good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

From this passage we learn that men AND WOMEN are created in God's image. For a very long time, hundreds, if not thousands of

years, God the creator has been portrayed as an old man with a long white beard. It doesn't help that Michelangelo portrayed God the creator as such on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. But doing so diminishes the Scriptural teaching that women are also created in God's image. Women are created in God's image.

Let's look for a moment at verse 28 wherein God instructs humans to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over all the creatures on the earth. Some have understood this as giving humans *carte blanche* in other words the freedom and the permission to do whatever they want with the earth; with the soil, the plants, and the animals, with all the natural resources; that since we are given dominion we are to subdue the earth. In other words we are given permission to use everything on the earth for human benefit without necessarily considering the consequences. This is certainly one way to read this text. But the world we currently live in, and the population that exists on this earth was certainly beyond the imagination of the ancient theologians. It is commonly understood now that we humans have an obligation to care for the earth. Dominion implies stewardship and care not abuse and destruction.

Two more points about this passage. At this point every creature on earth, including the ones that we now describe as carnivores were vegetarian. Every creature ate plants and the job of the plants was to produce seeds with abundance so that all creatures would be fed.

A second point to notice is that it is at the end of this day, the sixth day, that God steps back and looks at all that has been created and declares, not just that it's good, but that it is VERY good. God as the creative force, God as the artist, looks about and sees everything as beautiful, as very good.

NRS Genesis 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. 2 And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. 3 So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

4 These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

And on the seventh day, God rested. Yes, this is the basis for the understanding that there is to be a consistent day of rest. And

extending from this idea is that the day of rest is to be set aside to worship God. *Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy*. This is an accurate understanding of the Scripture. But there is another way to think about this "teaching." Up to and into the sixth day God has been very busy creating all kinds of creatures. Humankind was created last; one could imagine they were created in the afternoon; at the end of the day. If we go with that concept then the very first full day that humans lived on earth was a Sabbath day; a day of rest; a day set aside for communing with God; a day of making room in their lives for worship/interaction with God. Not a day of production. Not a day of running errands or completing chores. No, it was a day of "interacting" with God. And there is something powerful about that idea. As the "first day" it should be a day when we make room for worship; for communing with God.

I close my sermon with the words that we used to open our worship: (SORTA)

In the beginning was Jesus, and Jesus was with God, and Jesus was God. Jesus was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Jesus, and without Jesus not one thing came into being. What has come into being in Jesus was life, and this life was the light of all people. The light of Jesus shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Jesus is the light of our world. Trust and believe that whatever darkness you are experiencing will most certainly be overcome by Jesus the light of our world. Amen.