

Green Hill Presbyterian Church
“And It Was Good”
Thomas G. Speers, III
Trinity Sunday—June 11, 2017

Lessons: Genesis 1:1-2:4; Psalm 8:1-9

One night this past week I was driving home and turned up 19th street, just below Rockford Park, and as I drove up the hill towards Tower Road, the whole sky was filled with an enormous, pale golden moon just rising up into the sky. It was magnificent and I found myself thinking of the words of the eighth psalm, our psalm for today:

O LORD, our Lord,
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!
 You have set your glory above the heavens.
2 Out of the mouths of babes and infants
 you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,
 to silence the enemy and the avenger.
3 When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
 the moon and the stars that you have established;
4 what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
 mortals that you care for them?
5 Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
 and crowned them with glory and honor.
6 You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
 you have put all things under their feet,
7 all sheep and oxen,
 and also the beasts of the field,
8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
 whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
9 O LORD, our Lord,
 how majestic is your name in all the earth!

There are wonderful surprises surrounding us all the time if we only have eyes to see. Sitting on our porch, the sunsets can be spectacular. The first time I walked over to Green Hill Church I was surprised and delighted to discover a pileated woodpecker flying about the cemetery. We've got red tailed hawks that soar above us and even a family of foxes I've noticed from time to time in the cemetery. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

A number of years ago I was asked by a certain young person if I believed in the theory of evolution and I said that I thought it made lots of sense. This brought some outrage and confusion. How could I be a Christian and believe in evolution? I tried to explain that the magnificent story in Genesis does not contradict Darwin's theories or Newtonian physics. Professor Walter Brueggemann says that these texts should be taken neither as history nor as myth. Rather, he insists that "the text is a *proclamation* of God's

decisive dealing with [God's] creation...The whole [of Genesis 1-11] is a narrative about God's insistence that the creation should be nothing other than [God's] creation. Such a view leaves ample room for every responsible scientific investigation. But it yields not at all on the issue of the fundamental character of reality as *derived from* and *belonging to* this *sovereign, gracious* God who will seek to have [God's] own way. This *theological* affirmation permits every scientific view that is genuinely scientific and not a theological claim in disguise...This text is not an abstract statement about the origin of the universe. Rather it is a theological and pastoral statement addressed to a real historical problem."¹

To understand this, you must know that Genesis is not the earliest book of the Bible, even though it is the first. Scholars today suggest that it was written around the sixth century before Christ and was addressed to Israel in exile. It was developed in Babylon during the Jewish captivity there as a direct rebuttal to Babylonian theology. Says Brueggemann, "The Babylonian gods seemed to control the future. They had, it appeared, defeated the dreams of the God of Israel. Against such claims, it is here asserted that Yahweh is still God, one who watches over his creation and will bring it to well-being...God can be trusted."²

So if you want to understand creation as described in Genesis, imagine yourself as an Israelite in exile. Your world has been shattered. The side of evil seems to have won. Chaos surrounds you. Yet, Genesis proclaims that God remains our creator and is forever bound to the creation. Chaos is precisely the arena of God's saving activity. When the world seems So in our own times of exile, in our own times of being surrounded by chaos, in sickness, unemployment, loneliness, poverty, in every human experience of abandonment, God can still be trusted. From the beginning of time this has been the arena of God's saving activity. God is bound to God's good creation. God's Spirit hovers over the waters even when the earth is wild and waste and there is darkness over the face of the ocean. That is the proclamation of this story. "In the beginning, God" and in the present, God, and in the future God.

So we care for the earth, for this good creation, because it is a gift from God and God invites us to be creative just as God is creative. As Professor Terrence Fretheim writes: "A study of the verb *have dominion* reveals that it must be understood in terms of care-giving, even nurturing, not exploitation. As the image of God, human beings should relate to the nonhuman as God relates to them."³

We also recognize in each other something of God's image. *God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.* Both men and women are made in God's image. If you want to know what God looks like, then you need to include both women and men and don't stop there. Humankind is made in God's image, so if you want to know what God looks like pay attention to every single human being you encounter. They don't have to look like you or think like you or worship like you. Humankind is made in the image of God, so if you want to learn about God be open to God's presence in others no matter who they may be.

¹ Walter Brueggeman, *Genesis, Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching* © 1982 John Knox Press

² *Ibid.*

³ Terence E. Fretheim, *Genesis in The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume 1* © Abingdon Press.

A preacher could preach for a week or even a month on this text. I am not going to do that. I want simply to raise up the crowning jewel of creation and that is the seventh day when God rests. Professor Brueggeman writes about the implications for day to day living in this story. “Look at the emphasis on producing food and making sure there’s a next generation—and celebrating the Sabbath, which comes at the culmination of the first story of creation. You have to do that every week, so you don’t forget what kind of world this is...The Sabbath statement belongs to the whole narrative of creation. When our lives are not lived in that narrative, but are lived in a narrative of production and consumption, then the Sabbath becomes an add-on that has no particular meaning. I like very much the statement of M. Tsevat, who says that the Sabbath is the day in which he hands his life back to God every week to remember that is not his own. That acknowledgement that we belong to a generous God changes how we live the other six days of our lives. It’s necessary to stop producing and to acknowledge that our lives depend on receiving as well as asserting.”⁴

When we observe the Sabbath, we imitate God, looking out over creation, breathing deeply of that good creation, remembering that we are not responsible for everything, God is. When we remember the Sabbath, we increase our chances of noticing the extraordinary miracles that surround us all the time. When we live the Sabbath, we participate in God’s creative activity.

I invite you to join me in dreaming of a world where everyone sets aside the time simply to rest in the presence of God, to offer our lives to the God who created us, and to look out over the whole of creation and recognize that it is indeed good.

Let us pray: O God, help us to live in your good creation as you would have us live. Show us that you have not abandoned us but rather that you are active as you always have been active in the midst of the chaos we encounter. Free us from all that would keep us and our world from becoming what you desire. Teach us your way of peace; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, in *Genesis, A Living Conversation*, Bill Moyers, © 1996 Public Affairs Television, Inc. Published by Doubleday.