

Genesis 1:1 - 2:4

When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” 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. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

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. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. 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. 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. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

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, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

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.” 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. God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

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. 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.

Then God said, "Let us make humans 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."

So God created humans in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

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." 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. 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. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all their multitude. 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.

God's Playing Field - June 12, 2022

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The creation story is certainly one of the most memorable passages of scripture. As we heard this morning the beautiful version called, "The Creation", a poem by James Weldon, God progresses through 6 days of an outpouring, a wonderful outpouring of vision, marvel, and love. God starts with total chaos and ends with God's ultimate work of creation: human beings.

There are so many ways to look at this wonderful story. There are so many messages folded into its text. Now some see the Genesis account purely in scientific terms. There are some who believe that God created the world in 6 literal 24 hour days. If one goes through the Bible and adds up all the ages of the prophets and kings, a Bishop named James Ussher calculated that the world began on October 23, 4004 BC or about 6000 years ago.

Others of course would say the universe as we know it is 14 billion years old and our star, The Sun, is about 4.6-billion years old with the Earth being 4.5-billion years old. Quite a bit older than the good bishop's computations would suggest.

Sadly, the story of Genesis has devolved into a useless debate between "Creationists" who take the biblical account literally, and "Scientists" who rely on the painstaking cosmological research. I say sadly, because for our purposes today, the entire debate is completely irrelevant. Even today, the impact of the debate is such that many state school curriculums simply avoid the question of the origin of Earth altogether and that is a great shame.

Friends, the Genesis creation story and the chapters that follow are the foundation for everything that follows in the Bible. Without the creation story and the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and Noah and the Ark, none of what follows makes sense. Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus. Their work and missions are all a direct result of what happened on the very first pages of the Bible.

To consign the creation story to being merely a children's fairy tale -- as some would like to do -- is to miss the point altogether. When these words were written thousands of years ago, the Church was not concerned about science as we understand it in the 21st century. Never has been, never should be. Indeed, history has shown that when the Church blunders into scientific issues, they generally look foolish and attract only derision.

No friends, the purpose of the Church is about finding genuine meaning in life and helping us make sense of the human condition. As such, we follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived his life the way God intended all human beings to live life. If you want to know what God is like, what God wants, who God is, you only have to look at Jesus.

Jesus embodies, literally embodies, the best of the Jewish understanding of God and God's creation. Jesus' words and actions all reflect God's plan for the world.

So how do we know what God's plan for this world is? We only have to look at the first chapter of the first book of the Bible: Genesis.

If you are familiar with Genesis at all, then you certainly are familiar with the first words God spoke, "Let there be light." Yet that is not nearly the most important words God spoke. Instead, the words that we should remember, but tend to forget, are the words repeated seven times, "And God saw that it was good."

Friends, this is the most important thing to remember about creation. Not whether it happened 6000 years ago or 14-billion years ago. Not that the words, "Let there be light" are mysteriously reminiscent of the Big Bang. No, the one thing to always remember about creation is that God made everything and called all of it good.

This, friends, this was God's original plan. God created a wonderful, harmonious, beautiful paradise called Earth. God meticulously laid out how everything was supposed to work together. From plants exhaling oxygen to charge the atmosphere, to whales leaping in the oceans, to summer and winter and springtime and harvest. And ultimately, for human beings to care for it all in a glorious partnership with God.

Every part of it was good. Every aspect of creation was intended to compliment every other aspect of creation. So God made it clear when God said, "Let us make humans 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." What does this mean? In short, a level playing field. Paradise was an amazing field for human beings to play on and celebrate God's creation.

What does that mean? Image, likeness, dominion. God's beautiful plan at the time of creation was that human beings were to be copies of God. Our purpose was to be like God — limited in our powers and abilities, but nonetheless like God with a responsibility over what God has created. Yes, God is responsible for the universe, but human beings, individually and collectively, we are responsible for God's creation. We are to care for creation in the same way God cares for us. We therefore were made to care for and about each other the way God cares about us on a level playing field.

That was God's plan. That was God's plan. That was God's plan and as soon as we had the chance, we messed it up.

Look at what God intended: God created us male and female. That's the only differentiation in humanity God specifies. Why did God create males and females? Well, that's how creation reproduces and sustains itself. God's plan obviously meant something called DNA was part of it and males and females together make DNA, whether it's plants or animals.

So aside from the demands of biology, all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God and all human beings are given the task of caring for creation.

The implications of this are profound and they frankly contradict how humanity has functioned. Listen, friends! In God's plan, we are all equals. We are all equals. We are all equals. God made us a level playing field.

But obviously in the year 2022, we are far from equals. Where to start? Gender inequality, racial inequality, huge disparities in wealth, ecological inequality as the poorest also tend to suffer from bad water, bad air, and toxic chemicals. And of course, the reason that brings us here today, blatant, unjustified hatred and discrimination based on one's sexual identity.

What we see in the world today is a horrific aberration from what God intended for the world. However, from the Judeo-Christian viewpoint, we have an explanation as to why the world is as messed up as it is.

The explanation comes from the story of Adam and Eve and the snake. Whether you take the story literally or not is not the point of Eve being tempted by a snake to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. She ate and shared the fruit with her husband Adam and therefore caused God to punish them by expelling them from paradise.

The point of the story is not to see it as another Biblical fairy tale. Quite the contrary, the simple story of Adam and Eve the garden speaks to one universal truth: God gave Adam and Eve one command and one command only: don't eat from this tree. That's all you have to do.

Yet, when they had to choose between obeying or rejecting God's command, Adam and Eve made the choice to disobey God. In short, Adam and Eve decided they were better than God and knew better than God. In fact Adam and Eve decided to reject God, reject God's plan, and attempt to do better than God could.

Essentially, Adam and Eve did not want to be copies of God, created in God's likeness and image, they wanted to be God. That friends, is at the heart of all the problems of humanity. Instead of following God and obeying God's laws, humans want to take over and reject God. Adam and Eve and all who came after, including us, wanted an uneven playing field with some better than others.

By the way, do you know what the word "Adam" means in Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament? Adam means "dirt". Do you know what the word "Eve" means in Hebrew? Eve means "mother." Adam and Eve are not individuals, they are metaphors for humanity. In short, Adam and Eve are all of us. All of us, every one of us, when presented with the choice Adam and Eve had to obey or reject God -- all of us would and still choose to reject God.

And that friends, is why humanity is so messed up. That friends is why there is no level playing field. That is why there is so much suffering right now.

Think about it. Why is there inequality and injustice? Because some human beings think they are better than others. Under God's plan, that is impossible. All of us are created equal. All of us are loved equally by God. All of us are called to a sacred obligation to care for this wonderful creation.

But there are those who have to pretend that they are better than others. They have to hate anyone or anything that is different from their version of creation. They cannot live with the idea that far from being bad, the wonderful diversity of God's creation is the best thing God did. They strive to keep the playing field uneven and unfair.

Remember what happened after Adam and Eve defied God. Their son Cain killed his brother Abel. Chapter 1 of Genesis is the creation story. Chapter 4 of Genesis is the story of the first murder. How quickly humanity collapsed! Cain felt he was superior to Abel and therefore had the right to kill his brother.

Somewhere early on the Church of Jesus Christ forgot about the wonderful teachings about equality promoted by Jesus. What is remarkable about the gospels is that the writers emphasize how different Jesus was from the rest of his society. They stress that when Jesus healed, he healed people his own society rejected. He welcomed people of all nationalities, occupations, and religions. For Jesus the only people he hated were the haters. Jesus cried out against those who thought they could judge about who was in and who was out. Jesus wanted to balance the playing field.

Let us be clear, the Jesus of the Bible is not always the Jesus of the Church. We may call ourselves part of the Church of Jesus Christ, but the reality is that many, many congregations have proclaimed themselves to be gods and therefore have condemned various people in all places and backgrounds to a life of suffering. In the past, and sometimes even now, there are congregations that make women inferior, and condemned the cultural practices of countless indigenous people. The church has condoned slavery, sanctioned wars, and endorsed governments and candidates whose beliefs were and are totally opposite those of Jesus. And today we are saddened to state that most churches still judge and condemn the entire Pride movement and dare state the members of the LGBTQIA+ community are not even human beings. The playing field is still uneven.

This is wrong, my friends, this is utterly wrong. I am here as one man, one sinful imperfect human being — here to confess what the Church has done and even what I am sure I have done at times to hurt this community.

This congregation and hundreds and thousands like it must stand up and assert plainly and boldly that Jesus Christ came to earth to unify us and makes all equal. Jesus came to restore God's beautiful plan for creation. Look at the state of humanity today. The question we must ask is whether humanity is better off with or without the Church, as failed and sinful as we are.

My answer is YES because we would be even worse off without it. Make no mistake, Jesus Christ and the Church of Jesus Christ are two very different entities. But what can happen, what is happening is that slowly, slowly, ever frustratingly slowly, the Church is moving closer and closer to God's vision for the world for a totally level playing field — started at creation and endorsed by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Do we have a long way to go? Yes. Will there be setbacks? Yes. Will millions continue to suffer? Also yes.

But what is our choice? Shall we stay silent and let the haters win? Or shall we speak up based on our knowledge of Jesus Christ, shall we speak out, know that our God is a God of equality, and and shall we stand for the love of God and miracle of creation celebrated in the story of Genesis? God is on our side. God will defeat the haters, the judgers, those who consider themselves superior. Because God, my friends, God is always on the side of truth, love, and justice. Let us join together and help God level the playing field.

I say these words in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.