

SERMON  
 First Lutheran Church  
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Genesis 1:1-2:4a  
 Matthew 28:16-20  
 June 15, 2014

**ADULT MESSAGE** (Next Week – Part II on Creation & God’s Salvation)

It seems that a guy from Iowa, a guy from North Dakota and a guy from Minnesota were stranded together on a desert island. They had been there quite some time and were certainly anxious to leave. One day a corked bottle washed up on the beach. They ran down, picked it up and opened it. Out came a genie who promptly told them that he would grant each of them one wish!

The guy from Iowa started first. He thought of how much he missed home and his family and he said, “**I wish I were home!**” Poof! He was back home in Iowa! Next, the guy from North Dakota started to think about how much he missed home and his family and he said, “**I wish I were home!**” Poof! He was back home in North Dakota! Finally, there stood the guy from Minnesota, all by himself on the beach and he began to think how lonesome it was without his friends and he said, “**I wish they were here!**”

**Decisions, decisions.** I believe that God must have thought long and hard before God created human beings on that sixth day. In our text, we go along in a regular, rather monotonous fashion, recounting God’s work of creating the world, that is, for the first five and one half days. The pattern is God’s command that something happen and then it happens. But, all of a sudden, on the sixth day, after the animals have been created, **God stops and considers the possibility of making people**, human beings...

Will the creation of people be the **pinnacle of God’s amazing work**? Or, will it be the **downfall**? Will humanity be the **crown of God’s creation**? Or will it lead to the **death of God’s creation**?

Biblical scholars believe that the **oldest story** in the Bible is from **Genesis 12** where God chooses Abram to be the father of God’s special people. God promises to bless Abram so that all the peoples of the world can be blessed by God through Abram. God’s plan is for the people that eventually become the nation of Israel to be **God’s representatives**. God longs to gather to God self all the people of the world. God means to use Abram and his descendents to love and care for the world. This is the story

that the old grandmas and grandpas of Israel told to their grandkids around the campfires for hundreds of years before it was ever written down.

The **second oldest story** in the Bible is likely the one that is our text for today from **Genesis 1**. This is Israel's account of how God, their God, had created everything and everyone that exists. This first creation account is followed closely by **Genesis 2** where the creation story is told in an entirely different way. What do the two have in common? **God is the Creator**.

For most of its history, the descendants of Abraham were surrounded by hostile nations. Early on the Israelites were wandering, nomadic people who followed their sheep to wherever the grazing was good. Once they settled in Palestine, they were constantly harassed by the Philistines. The Philistines had mastered the use of steel for swords and for the building of chariots. The Israelites were on foot and armed only with bows, spears and sling shots. Israel was located on a narrow sort of land bridge that powerful nations trampled through again and again as they pursued war and conquest. Even after Israel's heyday as a nation under **Kings Saul, David and Solomon**, they ended up being overrun by the Babylonians and all their leaders, soldiers, artisans, priests and craftsmen were shipped into exile in surrounding nations. Biblical scholars believe that this Genesis 1 creation account was recorded while they were prisoners in a foreign land.

The Israelites lived in the midst of polytheistic folks who worshiped everything from the sun to the moon, to the water, to the trees... There were many creation accounts put forth by these other nations, some similar to Israel's. However, these other creation accounts reflected multiple gods, often capricious and fickle, that warred with each other, toyed with and abused humans and that were generally selfish and wicked.

So, this little two bit nation Israel was often the ridicule of their enemies. To those enemies they said, "**But we are the people of Abraham. We are the chosen people of God almighty!**" "**Hah!**" Their enemies said, "**which god is that?**" "**Our God is the creator of all that is! Our God made the things that you worship as gods.**"

The Israelites were **dependent upon their flocks and their crops**. Their creation account assured them that God was the source of their animals and their grains. They were **fearful of the ocean and its monster beings**.

Genesis 1 assured them that God had no fear of ocean or sea creatures, but even delighted in them.

The ancient Israelites had **no notion of evolution**. The Bible is not a **science** book, though it has some ancient science in it. The Bible is not a **history** book, though it has some ancient history in it. The Bible is not a **geography** book, though it has some geography in it. It is **not a text book** that has to be memorized in order to pass some sort of a **salvation test**. The Bible is the **story book** of how our loving God has moved since before the beginning of time to create and to claim all people as God's own precious children. **To give them a home and a God to call their own...**

The science of Israel's day pictures a world that looked a lot like a soup bowl with water and land floating in it. Above this soup bowl rested the **firmament**, a soup bowl shaped dome which held the waters above back from the earth. Sun, moon and stars hung suspended from this dome. Windows in the dome were opened and closed to allow rain to fall. During **Noah's flood**, the windows of heaven stayed open for forty days and the waters poured forth. By **Columbus'** day, people were still reluctant to go too far out on the ocean for fear of falling off of the edge of the world.

**Abram (Abraham)** was called to be the father of God's blessed and world-blessing people. They were to be witnesses to God's Word of Life for the world. What was their witness? Here in this first of two creation accounts found in the first two chapters of Genesis they told the world:

- Everything started with a **formless void and darkness everywhere**.
- A **Wind from God** swept over the waters of that void and began to bring order out of chaos. That wind word also means "**spirit**" or "**breath**."
- God spoke and amazing things began to happen.
- On **day 1**, **light** was called forth to drive back the fearsome darkness.
- On **day 2**, the **sky**, that firmament/dome, was put in place to protect the earth and people below.
- On **day 3**, **land** was brought forth and **God invited the earth to participate** in bringing forth **vegetation**. And God sees that God's work is **good**.
- On **day 4**, **Sun, moon and stars** are suspended from the dome – **good again**, in the eyes of God.

- On **day 5**, **sea creatures and birds** swarm across the globe and God tells them to **“be fruitful and multiply.”** **Good again...**

Have you noticed how closely the **order of this ancient progression** seems to be mirrored in the theories of evolution with everything starting in the water and then moving toward human beings?

- On **day 6**, God creates **land creatures** and finally, on that same day, **human beings**. Did God struggle over the decision as to whether humans should be created? “Then God said, **‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish..., the birds..., the cattle..., the wild animals..., and over every creeping thing....’**”

The **“image of God”** is used three times in describing those first humans. That doesn’t mean that we look like God. It means that God chose, **not only to create humans**, but to **gift them with the ability to be in relationship** with God and with each other. It means that God chose to include humans in a very real and important **partnership in the love and care of God’s precious people and creation**.

- Then came **day 7** when God **“finished the work that he had done, and he rested... 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 didn’t need to rest... God knew that God’s people need to rest from the labors of the earth, to rest in the arms of their loving God. We are the ones who need to rest... That’s why we are here today. We need to worship God and to rest in God’s grace. Being here today, is once again, coming home to the One who created, loves, forgives and sustains us. This moment **together with God** and with the **people of God** is **pure gift from God for our life and salvation**.

What did the children of Abraham, the people of God tell the world in this Genesis 1 creation account?

- God created everything and everyone.
- God took a huge risk by creating people in God’s image.
- God carefully constructed the world as a place where humans could flourish in God’s love and care.
- God loves and cares for the people and for the entire cosmos.
- God invites us to love and trust God to take care of us.
- God commissions us to love God back by loving and caring for the neighbor and the creation just as God has done from the beginning of time.

God took a risk and decided to create human beings – the people of Israel, the Philistines, the Babylonians, the Romans, you and me. Will the creation of people be the **pinnacle of God’s amazing work**? Or will it be the **downfall**? Today still, God **watches**, **waits** and **longs for the very best in our lives** and in the **lives of the people and creation around us**... Thanks be to God. Amen.