

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota
June 22, 2014

Genesis 1:1-2:4a
Genesis 2:4b-25
Matthew 28:16-20
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

ADULT MESSAGE

I was probably eleven and my two second cousins were probably four and six years old when they came to stay at our house. These little girls each brought a little doll with them. Somehow I got the idea of making a doll house and furniture out of a cardboard box. I was old enough to use a bread knife to carve the box up and scissors and tape to build walls and furniture. I worked very hard on the project and made the most marvelous doll house for them.

I was so proud when I finished and gave it to them for their little dolls. But, do you know what? They didn't play with it right. They were too rough and were wrecking everything and I got very mad at them. Didn't they appreciate what I'd done for them? It turned out that I probably cared more for the doll house than I cared for them. They probably didn't even realize that they weren't playing with it correctly. They were just having fun...

For those two little girls, the few days they spent at Great Auntie Olga and Great Uncle Charly's house, in the hot summer, away from their tiny, city apartment, away from their recently broken family – those days were a week of cool sanctuary in the country.

And they were loved there, by Charly and Olga – by the ones who had invited them, by the ones who owned the place and the cardboard and the scissors and the bread knife. They were loved by my mom and dad who knew that God owns it all, and all of us – little girls and bigger boys too. And to this very day, those two grown women, with children and grand children of their own, love Auntie Olga and Uncle Charly dearly and will never forget their care during that summer week and many times since.

The Christian church once argued that the earth was flat. The Church once argued that dinosaurs never existed, that God had just put their bones in the ground for us to wonder about. The Church argued that the creation occurred in seven twenty four hour days – even though Psalm

90:4 says, **“For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.”** And II Peter, 3:8 says, **“...with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.”** So could God have used 7,000 years to create the world? Could God have used 7 million years? The Church argued that **males were superior to females** and that **slavery was okay** in the eyes of God. But the Apostle Paul, in Galatians 3:28 says, **“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ.”** And the whole Bible joins Jesus in teaching that the greatest commandment is, **“...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”** (Mark 12:30.) And Jesus goes on to raise up the second commandment, **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”** And Jesus concludes by saying, **“There is no other commandment greater than these.”** (Mark 12:31.)

For a long time the Christian church has tried to **protect God**, or **what God did**, or **how God did it**, or **how we think that God did it**... And according to the creation account in Genesis 1, we were only **meant to eat plants** for food. Sorry deer hunters and fisher people... But in the New Testament, Matthew 14:9, Jesus himself multiplies the loaves and the fishes to feed the crowd of 5,000... Phew, and amongst the first that Jesus recruited to start his church were the fishermen of the ancient Sea of Galilee.

Our text from Genesis 1 starts out with one of the most famous biblical passages, **“In the beginning God created...”** This Hebrew passage can also be translated to say, **“As God was beginning the creation...”** Maybe God’s creative master work didn’t entirely stop on that seventh day. Maybe God is still moving creatively this many centuries later? What are the basic truths that come to us out of these ancient creation accounts?

- God creates humans in the **image of God**. God created us to be in life-giving relationship with God, people and the entire creation.
- God created us to be **caretakers of the creation** just like God is.
- God didn’t mean for us to live and work and play alone. God means for us to **live, breath and move in harmony and joy with God, others and the whole creation.**

Problem. Things are not working out the way God had hoped and dreamed. When humanity proves irresponsible, **when we fail** to love and trust God, when we fail to love and care for the people and the world around us, **God acts**. **God doesn't give up** on ancient or on modern people. In another famous passage, God's creative work is renewed. In John 1, we hear, **"In the beginning was the Word (that's Jesus)... And the Word became flesh and lived among us..."** **God didn't abandon** our broken world. God just came and embraced our world more closely, in the flesh of Jesus. From the start of creation, God has been moving to gather all people and the whole creation to God self in love.

After we killed and buried Jesus, he came back to life, and today offers forgiveness and new life to our world. In His last act here on earth, coming from our Gospel text for today, **Matthew 28:16-20**, Jesus says, **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always..."**

- **"Authority"** - God is in charge of the world.
- **"Disciples"** – Jesus is looking for people who will follow him.
- **"All nations"** – God wants to include everyone.
- **"Baptizing them in the name..."** – We are claimed for the family of God.
- **"Teaching"** – things like love the Lord, love the neighbor, love yourself, love the enemy, forgive again and again, feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, turn the other cheek, judge not...
- **"I am with you always."** – We're not in this alone.

In the book of Genesis, in words and pictures people of that day could best understand, God clearly creates us to be in communion with God, to partner with God. God invites us to join God, the critters and the creation in **ongoing creative dialogue**. In the Gospels, Jesus again invites you and me and all people into daily, moment by moment relationship and conversation with God, each other and the amazing world around us.

Last week we reflected upon **Genesis 1** and the first creation account. Just for a little perspective, think about **Genesis 2**. Not much time is spent on the earth. More attention is given to the **creation of humans**. In

Genesis 2, God forms humans not by speaking but by picking up the “**dust of the ground**” and forming Adam like “Play doh” and breathing “**the breath of life**” into him. Adam is given responsibility to “**till and keep the garden**.” Then, so that Adam wouldn’t be lonely, God “**took one of his ribs**” and made Eve to be his partner.

- “**Dust of the ground**” – We are kin to the earth.
- “**Breath of life from God**” – We are kin to God.
- “**Took one of his ribs**” – We are kin to each other.
- “**Till and keep the garden**” – We have responsibility to God, to neighbor and to earth.
- These are all a part of **living in a relationship with God**.

Maybe the science of the ancient people of God wasn’t so far off. They envisioned a protective “**firmament**” or dome that rested over the top of the world in order to keep everyone safe. Maybe there is a dome of sorts – made up of **breathable air**, **drinkable water** and **palatable food**... Maybe that dome does need protecting... These ancient creation accounts say that **we are all in this together with God**.

During the fast-moving years of my life, I have seen many changes.

- Television transporting us to distant, once exotic places.
- Humans visiting the moon.
- Our waterways cleaned up only to be fouled by exotic species.
- Segregation ended, but hatred remaining.
- Isolationism exchanged for the notion of a world community in order to save the planet.
- Many forms of cancer being driven back.
- Polio eliminated.
- Women’s rights uplifted while abortions run rampant.
- The rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.
- More and more conveniences and less and less time.
- And are we experiencing climate change as most scientists agree?

God created the world, people, a faith community. God issues the same invitation that was given to the earliest citizens of this world. God challenges us to follow God’s life-giving commandment in our world. God says:

1. **Love and trust me to take care of you.**
2. **Love me back by loving and caring for the neighbor and the creation.**

David L. Miller, retired editor of **The Lutheran Magazine**, wrote in the daily devotional book, "**Christ in Our Home**" this past Thursday, June 12th. He writes about the verse from Genesis 1:2. "**Darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.**" He cites a prayer that he uses in the mornings:

'I give you thanks, living and everlasting God, for you have restored my soul. Great is your faithfulness.'

David Miller goes on to say, "The prayer turns my soul to the Source of life, thanking God for waking me and giving me life one more time. It invites gratitude for another day to step into a universe where the wind of God's Spirit sweeps across the face of the earth, caressing each leaf, every grain of sand, and every human heart.

The Spirit restores our souls with joy, stirring us to yearn for the gentle light of God's new creation to fill the earth and chase away every darkness. The wind of God's life blows afresh each day, waking us and inviting us to peer out our windows... in hope."

I made a cardboard doll house for my little cousins. When they didn't play with it properly, I got angry at them. They needed my love more than the doll house. Out of love, God made the world and people and critters. God has high hopes for how we might use, share and enjoy it together with God. Things don't always work out the best. We are only human you know. God knows that too and loves us anyway.

We come from the hand of God. We live and move and find life in God. On our last day, we will return to God. In the meantime, God still lovingly and faithfully comes to give each and every person abundant life every day and forever. And, amazingly, God invites us to help. Thanks be to God. Amen.