

Sermon Bytes: Sustaining Creation

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I think I was about 15 or 16 before I ever realized that there were two stories of creation and that the stories spoke very differently not only of some of the details of Creation - the order of creation, for instance, but most importantly about relationships within creation and especially between people and the Maker of All Things and between people and the earth.

In the first story the writer calls the creator Elohim, which is the generic name for god, used over and over the first 5 books of the Bible called the Pentateuch. In the second story, God is called Yahweh, which is often translated as Lord God and is much more of a personal – relational God. This is the name God gives Moses on the Mountain, on the sacred ground in the shadow of the burning bush: “I am who I am”.

Also in the first story, the creative canvas is the formless void - the deep, or in other words, water. By comparison, in the second the creative canvas is the earth, and in particular the desert, void of flora and fauna.

In the first story, the creative media is the word: “God said ... and it was so”. In the second God gets out the sculptor’s clay and kneads and rolls, pushes and pinches, adds and scrapes away until – the form of humanity is ready. Have you ever done any sculpting or working with clay, or even seen someone who does? This is not some supreme Morgan Freeman-like voice, detached and creative. This is more like kids with at a water table, mud up to the armpits, and all over their bodies - a wisp of dried clay in their hair and smudges across their face. If all that hands on stuff isn’t enough, once the shape is ready, God inspires it – yes: en –spires it - breathes into it. Made not only in God’s image, but also with God’s hands, and in-filled with the very breath of God.

What happens next is also very different. No solemn Morgan Freeman-like voice from the clouds – “Go forth and multiply, have dominion over all the earth, go and make of the world what you will.” No instead God gets hands-on again. God makes a play pen for this new creation – a Garden, an Eden, which literally means – a place of delight. And then God puts the Man – Ish – meaning of the earth, into the Garden to tend it and to serve it. And when this eccentric creation cannot settle in, God once again gets busy - puts on the thinking cap and creates companion creatures: Aardvarks and ants, bears and bees, cows and cats, dolphins and dromedaries -You get the idea.

Why? Because this new creation is not meant to be alone, and these are created as companions - those who share bread, those who share life. So in this view of things we cannot lord over creation – that is, have dominion or control. We are not like earthly kings lording it over their subjects, but rather as God is in relationship with creation. A relationship as intimate as every breath we take. A relationship marked by creativity, grace and abundance.

When you think of it, there’s a lot of the Bible does not make sense, unless we consider it relationally. The great flood means nothing if we cannot imagine rain pouring from the

skies, washing over the earth. The story that Jesus told about the birds of the air and the flowers of the field has little power unless we can place the flight of a flock of birds with seeing them gathering from the field and the forest. And the image of the majestically clothed flowers of the field has little relevance if we have not seen daisies dancing in the wind or black eyed Susan's winking at the sun

Some time, go out into the bush, or your back yard, or your patio and consider the parables that Jesus told about farmers and shepherds and the ones he enacted with bread and fish and wine. In the context of the miracles of creation around us, suddenly the transformational, grace-filled stories of Jesus take on new depth and new meaning. The whole of the Biblical story takes on new depth and new power when we consider them in the context of the daily miracles of seeds sprouting and birds singing and flowers dancing in the wind. As Wendell Berry writes, "... how can we balk at the retelling of the miracle of water into wine, which in consideration is a small miracle, when we put it into the context of the larger by which water and sunlight and soil are turned into grapes?"

The time has come for us to let go our model of domination of the earth where everything is put to the litmus test of "what about me" to actually move through and beyond the model of the stewardship of the earth where everything is about how we see it and to move to the relational model of the first peoples, who know that we are linked to everything that is around us. It is time to move to a new, relational way of being in the world. Chief Dan George spoke of this mystical – relational way of being in the world when he penned these lines:

The beauty of the trees, the softness of the air
The fragrance of the grace – They speak to me
The summit of the mountain, the thunder in the sky
The rhythm of the sea – They speak to me
The faintness of the stars, the freshness of the morning
The dewdrop on the flower – they speak to me
The warmth of the fire, the taste of salmon
The trail of the sun
And the life that never goes away
– they speak to me
And my heart soars
Children of God,
made of the dust of the earth and the breath of God,
plant your feet firmly on the earth – this is all we have.
This is our home
Breathe deeply – you are the breath of God,
and all of creation is your sister your brother,
your mother your father.
We are all children of creation

Thanks be to God