

September 16, 2018
Lesson 3: God Created People
Scripture: Genesis 1:26 – 2:7

Context:

Today's scripture lesson moves us from the creation of the universe, the earth, and animals to that of humanity. We move through the five days to the sixth where we find God finishing the work that has been started. The final creation is that of humanity, breathing beings created in God's image.

There are two notes that are important for the text given for us to study. First, we find here in Genesis that there are two creation stories. The first story that ends in chapter one completes the understanding of the week; where we understand that God created time and rhythms. Humanity is the last part of creation as we read in verse twenty-seven. In verse twenty-eight, we move to hearing God talking to the humans, both male and female, giving them stewardship over the land. And all of it was good.

Our lesson then focuses on the second creation in chapter two where we read that God created humanity out of the land. From the verse we have the statement we repeat yearly on Ash Wednesday as we mark peoples' foreheads with ashes: "From dust you came and to dust you will return." We are reminded that we are part of creation when we read this passage..

Both of these parts of the creation story are important, yet separate. I always marvel at the fact that those who came together to establish the canon made sure that both were included. From one, we are affirmed that all people have been created in the image of God. From the other, we are affirmed that we are part of creation; the very land that we live upon is a part of our being.

There are also some very serious implications in this text though about humanity and God. The first is that sexual identity is part of creation, but it is not part of the creator.¹ The text does not assign God with any notion of masculinity or femininity or androgyny.² This reminds us that when we speak of God, we should be careful to say: "Well clearly God is a man because of x,y, or z." Of course the biblical text uses the pronoun "He" because the text was written in a patriarchal context. However, one will also find plenty of examples where God is given the metaphor of female such as the words of Isaiah 49:15: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I [God] will not forget you!" Thus, we should be careful to say that God the Father implies that God is a man. Instead, it is a rich metaphor for our Creator who is parent to all living things.

The second important implication prominent in the first creation account of humanity is equality between men and women. In verse twenty-seven, the statement is that God created humanity in God's own image, in the divine image of both male and female. At first it sounds strange that humanity would be mentioned in both the singular

¹ Walter Brueggeman, "Genesis," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY 1982), 33.

² *Ibid.*, 33.

and plural. Yet it gives an important affirmation. On one hand, humanity is a single entity as all stand before God.³ Yet on the other hand, humanity is a community of male and female, implying that not one is the full image of God alone.⁴ Thus, we are to see that men and women are equal as God created both in God's image. Any attempt to make one superior in any way is unscriptural and negates the truth stated here that both are a part of creation.

Application

There are two takeaways that stand out in this text. The first is an appreciation for scripture. Here we are given two different accounts of how humanity was created and in both we are given a story of how we are to live. From the first we are reminded that God has made us in God's image and that is a beautiful thing. Yet it continues with the admonition of being stewards as the rest of the chapter continues. God calls for humanity to take care of creation around them. Humans are to take care of other creatures and cultivate the beautiful land God has made. We are to enjoy God's creation and delight that we are a part of it. Think about it as you eat that squash on a Sunday dinner or take your pet for a walk or go fishing at your favorite water spot. That is all a part of God's incredible plan and we are blessed to be good stewards of this gift.

The other takeaway is that God has created humanity in God's image, making male and female equal. Something that always disconcerts me is when I hear people say that only men are to be leaders, whether in the church or even just within their marriage. The logic always goes back to: "Well God made men to be leaders and women only to be helpers to the men. That's clearly in the book of Genesis." Does that not defy what we have been told in these words of Genesis? Whenever those tropes are used with other scripture verses, I think we miss the point of this text in which we are reminded that God has made us equally important in how we do life together. God has made both men and women in God's image and to say that one is superior than the other splits God into two different entities with one more being more important than the other. While we worship a Triune God, we do not have a male god and a female god where one is more elevated than the other.

When I think about my own life, I marvel more at the gifts of different men and women than their gender. All people have been given gifts and all people have callings that God has placed on their lives. In the United Methodist Church, we are fortunate to have both male and female clergy. I am glad that I can serve alongside both men and women who are called by God to serve the church. Some of the best sermons, moments of pastoral care, and times of crisis I have experienced in my life have had both men and women stepping up to the plate to use the gifts God has given them to lead. Sure, maybe their gender gave them a different perspective, but often it was their intuition that helped them to discern what God was calling them to do. In all of them I see Christ at work as they respond to God's call on their life. May we give thanks to God for both the men and women we see who reflect God's goodness in how they lead their lives that God has given them.

³ Ibid., 34.

⁴ Ibid., 34.

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