

September 8, 2019

Lesson 2: Together, But Why?

Scripture: Genesis 2:4, 7, 15-18, 21-25

Context:

Last week we dove into the first creation story where we learned that God is God and that God rested from the labors on what we call Sabbath. This week we dive into the second creation story and look at a different aspect of God's creation, humanity. From this part of the creation narratives, we learn that God has created for us to exist together and not in isolation.

The select verses in this chapter reveal a difference in the way that Genesis chapter one explains the identity of God. In chapter one, God is remote, transcendent, and creates the world alone by word.¹ Yet in chapter two's creation story, God is down to earth, immanent, and is described in anthropomorphic language as if God were a human.² This nature of God gives us a different perspective on the why for humanity having existence for life together.

Even the case for the creation of humanity is more intimate in this creation story. First of all, God is like a potter who takes the soil and makes a human, breathing life into him.³ After the human is formed, God gives the man a purpose. Verses fifteen through eighteen describe God intimately putting the human into contact with the world and even giving instructions for the human. Yet there are prohibitions. The man is not to eat from the tree of knowledge. Instead, he is to focus on cultivating the land and eating from the other plants.

Human beings have a purpose. They are characterized by vocation, permission, and prohibition; there is human destiny.⁴ Yet we learn that God cares that humanity have this destiny alongside others. God cannot be man's helper. As if by trial and error God makes all the animals and birds with their partners, without one for man.⁵ God decides man needs a partner and so woman is created out of the rib of the man. They are created naked and have no shame. They are as God has made them.

It was common for the ancient world to wonder about the differences between man and woman, as well as the origins of humanity. The fashioning of humans from soil is a motif in the ancient Near East such as the Mesopotamian myth of Atrahasis.⁶ There is

¹ Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, (Oxford: University Press, 2011), 38.

² Ibid., 38.

³ Ibid., 39.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, "Genesis," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1982), 46.

⁵ Coogan, *The Old Testament*, 39.

⁶ Ibid., 41.

the theme that a divine figure is the one who breathes life into humanity. This Genesis creation story illustrates that theme of the divine life giving breath to all.

Application

It is important that as we read both creation stories we get a glimpse at how scripture can convey different important themes for our life. As we learned last week, the transcendence of God and the orderliness of God provide a view of God's omnipotence and grandeur. This week we learn about the more intimate side of God, the fact that God gives us a purpose and has even made us to do life with others.

The first lesson we learn in this scripture lesson is that God designed us for a vocation and a purpose. Humanity is formed and is given a task to do. Adam is made to live among the animals and to cultivate the land. There is a task given to him that gives him stewardship, not absolute power and control. He is given the choice of who he wants to be and there is still a boundary that he is not God. Yet God does give him what he needs to discern the tasks before him.

The same goes for us. God made us in the beauty of God's creation, not just to enjoy, but to preserve and protect. We are called to protect the land we live upon and to take care of the animals that belong to God. This doesn't mean that we don't hunt or fish. Instead, it means that we appreciate those things and see them as part of circle of life. It is why we should always preserve the land and honor it in whatever ways we can so that those after us may enjoy God's creation as well.

The second lesson we glean from this scripture is that God designed us to be in relationship with each other. God saw that Adam was alone and that it was not good. He needed help in attending to the ways of the world and to also have someone with whom he could experience intimacy and enjoy life beside. Thus, the creation of Eve, made from the rib of Adam.

For us today, we learn that we cannot do life alone. Today's story has often been used for the theological rationale for marriage. When a man grows up, he marries a woman, and they come together to support one another. There is the joy of sexual intimacy, as well as a support system for life together.

Yet marriage is not the only way that God has made us for life together. While the creation story sought to give the understanding of marriage and the attraction between the sexes, we know that a bigger point is that God made humanity for each other. Marriages can provide some of those needs, but there are other relationships where people find that joy and support that gives life meaning.

An examination of the last verse says that the humans were naked and felt no shame. While some people try to pin this verse to The Fall and sexuality and sin, I think another purpose is to explain that God has made humanity to take no shame in that we were created to support each other. At times, we will all need help in our journey, and hopefully, we have people who will always see the best and worst in us, and love us in all our complexity.

They are the people who are our "helpers," our spouse, friends, or family that we can do life beside without judgment or shame. God created us so that we may find ways to support each other, to "look upon each other" and feel no shame. Even a good introvert needs someone to turn to for hard times, but also to enjoy a good joke that needs to be shared. We were made to laugh, cry, and enjoy the presence of others.

What do you see as the purpose for your life? Where do you feel called to tend in “God’s garden,” that is the world? What places of service give you the greatest joy? Who are the people you see as your “helpers”? If you’re married, do you give thanks to God for your spouse and the love they give you? If you’re single, do you have those that you turn to “help” you and enjoy life beside? How can you be in relationship with others and appreciate those that God has placed in your life?

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