

And, It Was Good
From the Bible: Genesis 1 - selected verses

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There is this.

A snapshot of this past week captured in the headlines in the news.

She Said. Then He Said.

*Florence Triggered Floods Wash Into South Carolina
Tsunami and Earthquake in Indonesia Kill Nearly 400*

And, this.

*'Tip of the iceberg': predator priests abused thousands of children in Germany
Child Dies After Refugee Boat Capsizes
383,000 Estimated Death Toll in South Sudan's War*

And this.

*Airstrikes Are Killing More Civilians in Afghanistan
Before Kavanaugh Hearing New Accusations and Doubts Emerge
UN Speeches Suggest Israeli-Palestinian Divide is Deeper Than Ever*

Then there is this.

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light." and there was light. And, God saw that the light was good.

And then there was sun and moon and plants and animals and creeping things and flying things. All declared good. All leading up to this.

The God said, "Let us make humankind in our own image according to our likeness...So God created humankind in God's own image. Male and female God created them...And God saw everything that had been made, and indeed, it was very good.

It was sometime in August when I sat at my desk and realized that, at that time, I had only five more sermons to preach here at Bedford Presbyterian Church. Including this morning that number is now down to three. I spent part of that August morning thinking about what I would like to share with you over the course of my last couple months here. At that moment, I was thinking mostly about you. What I realized this past week, as I began to think about this morning, was the Bible passages which I found myself thinking about on that August morning were really mostly for me.

The reminders which I needed.

Reminders from you to me.

Reminders from the heart of this community of faith which has given me so much and shaped so much of my faith and sustained me in more ways than I know or can name. Reminders of what I want and need to carry with me as I step away from here and towards what comes next. So, this morning I turn once again to the incredible affirmation of faith written as Prologue for all that is to follow in the Bible.

I don't think of myself as naive.

Or, as a glass always half full optimist.

I know how life pushes in on you and on me.

And how unfair life can be.

And how best laid plans often go awry.

I live with that each day.

The unexpected phone call. The conversation in front of the Post Office.

He lost his job. A family member died. The doctor's report was not good.

And, I pay attention the what is happening around me.

I do my best to be informed.

I read and listen to the news.

Even when it makes my stomach churn and my heart break.

Especially lately when so much of what I read and hear makes me angry and sad and disappointed and fearful.

I am not usually a fan of the theological construct of total depravity. That we are all sinful and lost and inclined to be the worst and do the worst.

But, looking around, that idea is hard to ignore.

Which is why I need this morning.

And why I need to open the Bible.

I have preached this sermon before, but, as I said a moment ago, today I need the reminder. Maybe you do to.

The witness found in Genesis 1 is not about science.

And, not about history.

And, not about creation.

It is, primarily, an Affirmation of Faith.

A reminder that you and I have a choice about where we will stand and what we will see.

And about how we will see ourselves and how we will view each other.

And, about how we will see and understand the world in which we live.

These words were written during one of the most challenging times for ancient Israel.

The country had been conquered.

The people were in exile.

The signs of God's promise - land, king, temple - had been killed or destroyed or overrun.

Out of that darkness and despair came this.
And God saw all that God had made and, indeed, it was very good.
I need to believe that.
Even more than what I need, I chose to believe that.
I chose to believe the world is destined for better.
I chose to be you and I are destined for better.
I chose to believe you and I can and are called to make the world better.
I chose to believe there is more goodness in the world than evil.
I chose to believe there is more decency and kindness than indifference and hatred.
I chose to believe the long arc of history does, in fact, bend in the direction of justice.
That choice is the source for the strength and the courage and the faith I need to do what I do
just where I am in my own small way to hold onto that goodness. To help bend that arc.

Can I prove any of this to you?

No.

And, there is certainly enough proof out there to say I am wrong.

And, that my trust and faith are misplaced.

The news this week felt like a punch in the stomach.

Then, I open the Bible.

And, make the choice again

To hold onto these words that there is goodness.

Built into our DNA goodness.

And, I chose to face in that direction.

Because where we stand and what we see helps determine the direction we go.

Consider this... [video]

This is the truth

If we turn things upside down

We can't expect goodness to win in the world

I would be lying to you if I said that

The human race has a great future ahead

That altruism could replace egoism

That your lives could be filled with joy

That your children could be safe and healthy

Before anything you must know

The human race does not deserve these things

And I am convinced of this because I know you

Corruption and hypocrisy are in your nature

Compassion breeds weakness when only the strong survive and

I refuse to believe under any circumstance that

You can turn things around in the coming years

This world may be sinking to new depths but

There are even more revelations to come

*The human race has only one destiny
And whether you like it or not
This is what is real
I am the Lord, your God
You should know I believe exactly the opposite
I am the Lord, your God
This is what is real
And whether you like it or not
The human race has only one destiny
There are even more revelations to come
This world may be sinking to new depths but
You can turn things around in the coming years
I refuse to believe under any circumstances that
Compassion breeds weakness when only the strong survive and
Corruption and hypocrisy are in your nature
And I am convinced of this because I know you
The human race does not deserve these things
Before anything you must know
That your children could be safe and healthy
That your lives could be filled with joy
That altruism could replace egotism
The human race has a great future ahead
I would be lying to you if I said that
We can't expect goodness to win in the world
If we turn things upside down
This is the truth. (Vertigo Backwards)*