

Today we begin what is called the second creation account. But not before we finish with the first one; that ending is told in the first verses of chapter 2. The past two weeks we have heard read in worship the creation story of Genesis 1, and all the heavy lifting of making worlds God has done by now. By the beginning of chapter 2, all that's left is to sit back and enjoy what has been made. Well, of course we understand that is not exactly true- we remember the words God spoke to the male and the female, "be fruitful and multiply," and watch over the earth and care for it. So there was still work to do. But on the seventh day, after all that labor, God rested. God made that day special, blessed it, so that thinking creatures are called to sit back and enjoy, called to reflection, remembrance, gratitude, and worship. It's on the seventh day that we can understand what creation was all about, and what we are about, as we join God in his rest. And so, the word of scripture is that creation was not completed until the seventh day. And thus, with that, the first part of the story has ended, it has reached its desired outcome- the Sabbath- and now, we need to see the story from a different perspective. And so we begin again.

And we read, “In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.” And immediately the story of chapter 2 is smaller and more intimate—here, our writer begins with the earth and not the heavens above us, not the endless universe: God works on the ground. In this story, for the first time, God has a name: “the LORD,” when written in all caps in the Hebrew Bible, signifies the letters of God’s name, *YHWH*, which Jews would not pronounce out of fear and reverence. “The LORD,” and we see that God has come near so that we can know who he is. And then, God made the man.

Again, what a contrast to the creation of the male and female created in God’s image. In chapter 1 God speaks the universe into existence, the stars and galaxies, and our solar system, earth and its atmosphere, and everything on the land and in the oceans, and humankind. But in the second creation, God makes the man before anything else, not by irresistible command, but by shaping with his hands out of the “dust of the ground.” And then, God breathed life into the man. A very different story: the all-knowing, omnipotent God we see now as a craftsman, a surgeon, an artist. In this way we often compare the two accounts of creation. But it is by holding them together that we can see what humanity is.

Carl Sagan was right, we are “star stuff,” part of everything that was made, and part of everything that has ever been, and called into existence by the Prime Mover- the unknowable, Almighty God; and we are male and female, we can only understand ourselves when we recognize our shared humanity, and our need for one another; and we are dust, designed and formed by the hands of *YHWH* God; and we are breath, a living entity that participates in the life of God, because we breathe the air from God’s lungs. The creation stories are lessons for us to learn; they were not written to become doctrine, but to explain what we are and what we are to become. In chapter 1, the next words after the creation of the male and the female are, “and God blessed them”; in chapter 2, “the LORD God planted a garden and put the man there.” The creation stories are the confession of God’s people- of God’s goodness, God’s provision and care: in the garden, God planted every tree for the man; and the blessing of God in chapter 1 has God saying, “Look! I have given you every plant and every tree for food.” As one writer paraphrases, it is God telling the human, “All this is for you.”

And so, what is our response? The primary one, we realize, should be thankfulness. That God has done this for us, God worked, God planted. And our

second response should be to try to understand our connection to everything: that we are all part of one another- each of us is male and female, created in the image of God; that we are part of the world around us- the trees grow out of the same ground we were pulled from; and that we are even part of wild nature (even if supposedly lords over it) for chapter 1 tells us that the beasts also have the breath of life, and that God provides for them, as well.

When we think of creation, we probably think of God's power- to have created something out of nothing! and God's plan and forethought to have made everything "good." No mistakes, we like to think. But one scholar has said that "the point of the creation stories is not so much about God's power and infallibility, but God's faithfulness and mercy." Thus, we can reiterate that the stories are Israel's confession of God, and our confession. The God we know and continue to learn of as we read the story, continuing from here and into ancient days, and down through the ages, and even throughout the years of our lives; and seeing this God more clearly as we take our Sabbath rest, and worship and give thanks.

We know the second creation story does not end here with the man and the fruit trees in the garden. We've heard the story before, and besides, we're here! But the biblical story continues out of this second account, not the first creation story. The people that will now come after, our ancestors in the faith and eventually us, all the history of the world, come from the man of earth and the woman of the rib, not from the cosmic, semi-divine male and female of chapter 1. The saga in scripture will go on for hundreds of years, humans believing and trying to believe, obeying or not, living and dying; and even now we still trying to discover what it means that everything "was good," and trying to find our meaning as humans- living beings with the breath of God, and earthly desires: with all *this* provided, and still somehow wanting more.

Someone has said that the stories also emphasize human freedom, "All this is for you," God says to the male and the female in the first story: creation is a gift, to use as we wish. And the second story, too, has it, that "in the midst of the garden, the tree of life and the tree of knowledge- of good and evil." Those final words of our text this morning sound an ominous tone- maybe it's because we know how the garden story ends- but the words do hold the concept of freedom,

a choice. And that we have, as a gift, the ability and the responsibility to decide for good or for evil. (There is more to say about that, of course, it has been discussed for a long, long time.) So, the tree of knowledge in the garden, is not just a dramatic prop for the story of Adam and Eve, and not an intentional source of temptation for the first couple, but thefact of human life- that we are surrounded by blessings and reasons for hopefulness- God planted a garden and provided everything for life- and yet, there is the possibility of good or evil: life is made up of choices. As we follow the epic story, by reading it and living it, we will learn the best ways to make good choices; but even when we do not, still we are called to Sabbath rest and giving thanks, and remembering that we are God's creation and filled up with God's breath- everyone of us- and part of all that is, part of one another.