

Series: God's Story, Our Story

Title: Creation

Text: Gen 1:1-3, 26-31; Jn 2:7-11

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If you've ever had the chance to enjoy the award-winning Netflix series, the Crown, we watch with intrigue at how the Royal Family staff expends tremendous energy controlling the story of the the Royal Family members surrounding young Queen Elizabeth. Any possible event that may cast the hint of an unwanted shadow upon the glimmer of her and the Royal Family name is quickly dealt with in the least-intrusive, but often heavy-handed way. Princess Margaret, Elizabeth's sister must sacrifice her relationship with American lover for the sake of her sister's honour. Prince Phillip, Elizabeth's husband, feels slighted that his wife's regal role takes precedence to anything else in his family.

Fast-forward to this year and a recent Chateleine article describes how the Royal Family staff are frustrated with controlling the stories coming from the extended family of Meghan Markle, the newly wed bride of Prince Harry. The Royal Family is deeply concerned with how their story reads to the world.

It doesn't just happen "over there" across the pond. It's literally happening in our backyard.

News media is saturated with concern for what's really going on in the White House. What's the true story of our government? Or are we just getting played by the narrative staffers are presenting to us? AND all the while, we're trying to figure out which media source to actually believe!

Now most of us don't have full-time staff departments handling our media presence and the kind of narrative we are presenting to the world, but I think many people struggle with the same concern, but it shows up in different places. Is my academic career attractive enough for colleges to accept me? Does my professional career tell a story of increasing responsibility worthy of recognition and reward? Do my linkedin,

instagram or facebook posts tell a story worth following? Now this can be either stress-inducing because of the energy needed to maintain your “story”, or depressing when you realize your story is noteworthy to no one except maybe your mom.

Now, what if I told you that your story is a lot more significant than you might think? And that you’ve got someone who’s writing your story that cares more for you than you might realize? We’re going to look at these questions through today’s message.

This fall, we’re embarking on a new series called God’s Story, Our Story, which looks at how the story of God’s work in the world is revealed in Scripture. As we get to know this story of God in Scripture, we find that our stories are weaved into His incredible story through the person and work of Jesus Christ revealed from Genesis to Revelation. This overview of scripture that we’re going to do over the next two months has brought much depth to my own life and faith by framing my life story in relation to the big story that God is writing in history. It’s brought me a sense of wonder and gratitude and hope in the way I approach the world we live in.

Today, we look at the first words of the first book in Scripture, hearing how the Living God of Scripture creates and how the Living God invites us to participate in His work of Creation. And we’ll walk through the passages we just read in three parts:

“Let there be..”

“Let us Make”

“Be fruitful and multiply.”

“Let there be...” - Gen 1:1

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”

The first sentence is a summary introducing the whole passage. It can be read as the first event, the origin of the heavens and the earth - creation of space, matter and time.

Although other creation accounts are recorded In Ancient cultures, none compare to the distinctiveness of this opening statement. The God of Scripture here is not one of many gods competing for the sacrifices of a barely tolerable human race. Here, the Living God is the only being that exists in the universe who, in His infinite wisdom and joy, wills the universe into being. The sun and moon and the oceans and the wind are not gods in their own right, but they have been created by the one God. It is not humans who sacrifice to satiate fickle the gods of the universe, but it is the Living God who satisfies humankind with food.

God creates for the sheer joy of sharing the delight of the Father, Son and Spirit that has existed since the beginning of time. Creativity, joy and love overflow from the Triune God and spills into and through Creation. And it is good.

One of my brothers-in-law is an app developer and worked at google until he took his family on missions with YWAM. This summer, he gave us a google home device and it was one of the first appliances we got up and running in our kitchen when we moved in last week. If you're not familiar with google home or alexa, they are like digital assistants for your home. I speak. It responds. I speak, “Hey google, add milk and cereal to my shopping list.” and it appears on my shopping list. I speak, “Hey google, add this to my calendar on Sept 3 - Have coffee with Jerry.” and it shows up on my calendar. “Hey, google. How long is it going to take me to get to Arlington, where Neal is treating me to lunch?” Google tells me and sends the directions to my phone. I speak. Things happen.

I speak, then Google takes my voice, my email and calendar account, my contact list and the information available on the internet and makes it something useful for me.

God speaks, and he makes something completely out of nothing.

“Let There Be”

We are told in this beginning chapter of Genesis that God simply speaks “Let there be light.” and light comes. He calls day “day” and night “night” and they become day and night. Over the first week of creation, God speaks, and things come into being. God speaks. And everything in the universe is created.

While google takes what already exists and assembles the ingredients of information into something useful, the Living God of Scripture, takes what does not yet exist and speaks it into being. Ancient cultures and mythologies have always envisioned gods creating the universe ‘ex materia’ = latin for ‘Out of pre-existing matter’.

<SLIDE: Ex materia vs Ex nihilo>

Greek and eastern mythologies describe the world being formed out of some primeval matter, or ‘chaos’. But the Living God creates ‘ex nihilo’ - latin for “out of nothing” - simply by the power of His word. He takes what isn’t there and makes it into something.

As the first week of creation goes by, we arrive on day 5, where God’s creation is “teeming” with life, “Let there be” has become a declaration of possibility, of creative power surging through the veins of all living beings. There is a sense of beautiful unfolding of what is to come. Andy Crouch, the editor of Christianity Today, writes in his book, “Playing God:

redeeming the Gift of Power”, “When the words let there be ring through the universe, they accomplish very literally what they describe - the creation of being where there was none before. New beings come into existence, each with their capabilities, potential and sphere of influence. In “let there be”, the Living God is conferring multiplying creative power upon His Creation. And the end of each day where God speaks, “Let there be”, God looks upon his work and call its “good.”

“Let Us Make...”

On the sixth day of creation, the tone shifts. “Let there be” becomes “Let us make” when the Living God speaks humanity into existence.

26 Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,^[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

The spoken word of God switches from wildly expansive to deeply personal. The Living Triune God expresses his personal investment in Creation. No longer is it possible to see the Living God as distant and aloof, but He has crowned His creation with image-bearers that will continue their Maker’s fruitful dominion over all Creation.

Since the beginning of creation, God intended for humanity to be his agents of creative image-bearing in the world. “Let us make” is not only God’s work in Creation, but becomes our means of enacting “Let there be.” “Let us make” hints at how we take our ideas from “Let there be” creative conception into collaboration with others that finally leads to the flourishing of all creation.

Yesterday, our belongings finally arrived on the moving truck at our home. So it was a whirlwind day taking inventory, unpacking, sorting and placing. Before the items arrived, each one of our family had “Let there be” ideas in our minds of how our house would be set up. We each envisioned where our belongings - especially the ones each one of us cared most about - would go. Possibility. Creativity teeming from each member of the family’s hearts.

Julia’s “Let there be” was to have our upright piano to anchor the living room, with the other pieces complementing it, but “Let Us make” came in when we began to brainstorm and discuss how the other pieces would be set up. Ashley’s “let there be” was to have all new furniture for her room. But “Let us make” from her parents was literally, “Let us make ... do with some old furniture” until we can find some new furniture in the right time. Evan’s “Let there be” was to have his computer set up and running for him to hop back online with his friends. And well... He pretty much went from “Let there be” my computer to “Let me make” it happen.

Whether it’s in our homes or in our workplaces where we dream up possibility for solutions, for designs, for policies in our “Let there be” moments and we move towards “Let us make” moments, we are bearing God’s image in the world, especially when it leads to the final movement in this Creation narrative - a command to “Be fruitful and multiply.”

It is only after the expansive possibility of “Let there Be” is followed by the collaboration of “Let Us Make” that we finally hear the imperative from the Living God to “Be fruitful and Multiply.”

“Be fruitful and multiply”

Gen 1:28

“Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

The Living God sets everything in place with consummate skill according to his grand design. From formless and dark to light. From water to land. From simple to more complex organisms. Adding vegetation, some bearing fruit, some not. Adding sea creatures, birds and livestock and ultimately, humankind to serve as the stewards of all that God had created. God takes Adam and Eve, sets them in a garden, an oasis of order within the wild teeming life of Creation and invites them to participate in His creative acts in the world. He instructs them to “be fruitful and multiply” what God has created. We’re told in the following chapter in Gen 2:20 that Adam is commissioned to continue God’s creative work in the world through tending of the plants and naming of all the creatures of the earth.

God invites us to continue in this work of ordering of his creation that brings flourishing to the world we live in. Of course, we do not live in a primarily agrarian society. But much of our work involves sorting and naming - sorting out concepts and naming ideas. Sorting out words and images if you are in the arts. Naming injustice if you are in non-profit work. Sorting out policy if you are in law or naming a physical ailment if you are in health science. Sorting out curriculum for your students to learn or naming problems and solutions if you are in technology. Sorting your children’s clothing and naming their emotions if you are their caregiver. And yes, even sorting your receipts and naming and categorizing your expenses... though completely mundane. All these may just be a part of God’s call to set things right in this world. All these can be seen as creative acts where God invites us to extend his good work in the world that He has created. And that is good.

All of our work may not be the kind of work that we are thrilled by. Some of us might even find our work environments toxic, but because of what God has started since the beginning of time and because of what He

invites us to participate in, our work in the world can be meaningful. It can be hopeful, even when the immediate results may not be apparent to us. The story of God's work in the world frames our work in the world.

Let me come back to the two questions I asked you early on in the sermon - I asked you to consider if the story of your lives perhaps could be more significant than you think and that the one writing your story cares for you more than you realize.

I grew up in a family that loved Jesus and church was a big part of our lives. My dad is a retired pastor. And my mom held a research position at the university, yet they always modelled what it looked like to let God lead our lives and our family through Scripture, through serving others and serving God. But it was only when I became an adult where I began to hear an approach the biblical story that I'd never heard before. I realized that the Christian faith wasn't just about believing that Jesus died for my sins, and that I should serve him faithfully. Scripture wasn't just a series of bible verses and interesting stories to remember so I could live a good life. In Scripture, I began to see this story unfolding that God was inviting me to join through His son Jesus. And that grand story that God has been writing since the beginning of time has now become my story. And that changes how I look at the world, how I look at my vocation, how I care for my family and for those around me. I don't have to write my own story to be the hero. The Living God has been writing this story since the beginning of time. And there is a hero in this story named Jesus that I get to know.

Closing:

Two thousand years ago, God appears on the scene again in Ancient Palestine as Jesus Christ and does another miraculous creative act. at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Again, he takes something that wasn't there and creates something new. He takes water and turns it into a completely new substance, wine. And through his presence and action at this rural wedding, he turns the event into an extravagant celebration that teems with life and honour to the host couple.

I think it is fitting that Jesus' first miracle performed as recorded in John's Gospel is an act of Creation. Through His intervention, people are blessed. Life comes. Rather than a party where the wine runs out and the host family is shamed, Jesus intervenes by creating and they are honoured. That's what Jesus comes to do for each one of us - to confer a kind of honor upon us that we could never work hard enough for. All we can do is to see what He offers us and respond in repentance and trust to experience all that he offers.

We can all work and create and make meaning of things on our own strength. Some of us are exceptional at these kinds of tasks. But when we put our work in the world and frame it in light of Jesus Christ, we find a new story is formed - one that honors and blesses and brings teeming life to those around us. And our work in the world in light of Christ frees us to serve and steward with abandon. Because we aren't the ones who determine the end of the story. Jesus does. And that is good.

In the C.S. Lewis classic, *The Great Divorce*, a man is given a tour of heaven and sees a woman of dazzling beauty surrounded by children dancing, playing instruments and singing in her honour.

Turning to his guide, he asks if she is a famous public figure. But the guide replies: "She's someone you have never heard of. Her name on earth was Sarah Smith and she lived at Golder's Green.

"She seems to be someone of great importance."

“Aye, she is. But fame on earth and fame in heaven are very different things.”

“And who are these boys and girls who are dancing and throwing flowers before her?”

“They are her sons and daughters.”

“She had many children.”

“She had no children of her own. Every boy that met her became her son - even if it was only the boy that brought the meat to her back door. Every girl that met her was her daughter.”

“Wasn’t that a bit hard on their own parents?”

“No. There are those that steal other people’s children. But her love was of a different kind. Those on whom it fell went back to their natural parents loving them more...”

And now the abundance of life she has in Christ flows over into all creation.”

Lewis draws out in this story how the story of our lives ends much differently than we might see in this life or imagine in the life to come. As we live out our lives in response to the one who Created us, we find God’s story becomes our story.

And in this story, we find we don’t live false or fictional identities, but in fact, we end up living into our true identities as God’s image-bearers in the world. And when God, our Creator looks upon us, He can say, “It is good... It is very good.”

PRay...