

Genesis 2:4b-9, 15-25
Matthew 6:25-32

Grace Congregational United Church of Christ
September 8, 2019 Kim M. Henning
"Eden: Our First Taste of Home"

Grace to you and peace from God who comes to us decisively in Jesus of Nazareth. Amen.

Tell me, a child asks in wonder, how did all of this come to be? The planets, the stars and the moon, how did they come to be? The earth with its gushing rivers, the oceans with their leaping dolphins, the forests with those gigantic Sequoias, how did they come to be?

Tell me, a child asks. A child knows that daffodils and squirrels and roses are too gorgeous to be a stroke of chance. A child knows that the stretched-out neck of the giraffe and the enormous body of a rhinoceros are awe-inspiring. A child when she gets to school will learn that there is just the right of oxygen in the air for us to survive and she will learn about the human brain, the nervous system, the muscles and the blood flowing throughout the body---ever-so-perfectly.

Tell me, a child asks in wonder, how did all this come to be?

The simplest, most honest answer we can give is, 'God.' "O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder, consider all the worlds thy hands have made. I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder, thy power throughout the universe displayed. Then sings my soul, my Savior, God to Thee, how great thou art, how great thou are, then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee, how great thou art, how great thou art."

How did this come to be? God. James Weldon Johnson wrote a poem entitled creation:

And God stepped out on space, and he looked around and said:
I'm lonely—I'll make me a world.

And far as the eye of God could see darkness covered everything,
Blacker than a hundred midnights down in a cypress swamp.

Then God smiled, and the light broke, and the darkness rolled up on one side,
And the light stood shining on the other, and God said: That's good!

How did this come to be, a child asks? How did this come to be, an adult ponders? "Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being."

On Ash Wednesday each year the church somberly announces, "you are dust and to dust you shall return." You and I need Ash Wednesday. When our egos become too big, when our pride becomes too powerful, with an ashen cross you and I need to be reminded that we are mortal.

But today the church tells the other side of the story, "from the dust of the earth, God created humans." God then breathed into the human the breath of life, and the human became a living being. The story is breath-taking.

God, in the beginning of time, created 'the human.' Can you imagine the joy as God says, "this one shall be called, 'Adam' and this one shall be called 'Eve.'" But now God has something else to ponder. What in heaven's name is God to do with the human? You don't just create something and walk away. The human needs a home.

Immediately after the creation of Adam---the next sentence reads, "And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed." The biblical story just gets better and better! God planted a garden as a home: "Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

Genesis gives us all kinds of information regarding Adam's first home. Four rivers flow through the Garden of Eden. The name of the first is Pishon; the second river is Gihon, the third is the Tigris, and the fourth is the Euphrates.

Eden is the first place humans call home. Eden has trees, trees that are delightful to the eye, some of which produce fruit. Eden has four rivers. God knew the importance of water, water for drinking, water for cleaning, and water for the preservation of anything that lives. No water, no life. Eden, our first home we say, was "paradise."

Home is where I go to replenish myself at the end of each day when I feel tired. Home is where we go to get the chaos out of life. Let movie theaters show what they want, we don't want pornography at home. Let people talk the way they do at work, we don't want those words at home. Home is where we are with people we trust and love. Home is where we sleep; it is where I can count upon being forgiven when I've erred.

It is painful to think about Hurricane Dorian that has swept through the Atlantic this week. For three days, Dorian just sat above the Bahamas. Homes were destroyed. Furniture, tables, beds and refrigerators disappeared. Electricity is gone. In an ironic sort-of-way, did you know that one of the Bahama Islands is named, "Paradise"? Paradise---Eden---our first home.

What a powerful word home is. The human heart hungers for home. When we've been fired at work, where do we go, but home? When death is imminent, where do we want to be, but home?

Eden is the first human home. John Calvin says that the most obvious learning from Eden is that we are called to humility. Calvin has a way of being abrupt. He says we're stupid if we don't learn humility in Eden. God is God; we are not.

Eden is where Adam and Eve are given responsibility. "The Lord God took the man and put him in Eden to till it and keep it." God plants the garden but the pulling of weeds and the hoeing and the trimming are the human's responsibility. It is not a place of entitlement.

Eden is also where we learn self-discipline. “The Lord God commanded: You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall die.

Eden is the first place that humans call home. At another time in history, our forebears were slaves in the country of Egypt for some 400 years. For 400 years our forebears were homeless. What does it mean to be homeless? They have no temple. They have no voice over their own existence. Their lives are not their own. The land is not their own. Seven days a week they labor.

Homelessness is a human crisis. Here is an interesting thing to think about. When the Israelites settle in the Promised Land, the people are commanded to tend to the homeless, to the stranger and to the foreigner because they had once been foreigners.

Leviticus 19: “The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.”

Deuteronomy 10: “You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Eden was our first human home. I think about the parable of the prodigal son. When his life falls apart, when chaos is everywhere and no one seems to care, what does the younger son desire, ‘but home’?

On the night before his death, Jesus gathered his disciples together. Jesus’ disciples seem to be anxious, they seem to know that Jesus’ death seems imminent. What does Jesus say in John 14?

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so would I have told you that I go and prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.