



CREATION: HOW WE FIND OURSELVES IN GOD'S HANDS

June 24, 2018, Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 1:1-2:3

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How we see the world is invariably shaped by where we are sitting. If you look at most of the maps depicting the world that are made in this country we find the United States on the top half of the map and in the center. It makes sense. Living where we live it is natural for us to focus on our own country as the center of things. If you ever see a map that shows the southern hemisphere of the world as the top of the map, it is just as accurate a portrayal of our world but utterly disorienting to our usual perceptions. We do not even recognize our world or our place in it.

As spring transitions into summer, I am often drawn to the creation narratives we receive in the Bible. I suppose it is inspired by all of the lush growth this time of year. Over the next several weeks I will be preaching on the different ways scripture portrays God's creation of the world. During the first two weeks we will be looking at the two creation accounts we are given in Genesis. Both of these creation narratives, the one in the first chapter of Genesis and the other in the second chapter, seek to provide a map to the nation of Israel. They both seek to help people recognize where they are placed in the world, each written during a very distinct time in their history.

At times people have denigrated the creation accounts because they do not neatly match up with our scientific understanding of how the world was formed. But they were not written to explain the actual creation of the world. They were written to explain our place in the world, to give us a theological framework by which we can understand both how we find ourselves living and how we are called to live as the children of God.



The creation narrative we heard read this morning was written primarily during the time of the Babylonian Exile. The nation of Israel had been defeated and many of their residents had been taken captive and transported to Babylon. They were a nation without a nation. All the promises of being God's chosen people appeared to be broken. They were struggling to understand their place in the world and God's place with them.

Before all of this happened, their place in the world was clear. Although they were a small nation, God had chosen to be in relation with them and had guided their destiny from slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. They believed that God had given them a geographic location and had guaranteed their existence in that place. Finding themselves captive in Babylon turned everything on its head. Were they still God's chosen people? Was their God perhaps not as powerful as these Gods that the Babylonians worshipped? From this place of despair and defeat it was hard to know who they were or what to believe.

They needed a wider vision of the world and of their God. And they were given just that in the first chapter of Genesis. Unlike creation stories from other faiths, there is no competition for supremacy among a host of competing deities. There is a single God in charge and present at creation. And the process is precise and well ordered. Step by step, we hear God's voice calling out, taking what is formless and giving it form, separating light from darkness, waters, and land and sky, each put in their assigned place. Everything named and organized according to God's exact intention. And everything seen as good in God's eyes. All geography laid into place. Every creature created in abundance and allowed to thrive in its designated location.

And then humankind is created. Created out of the very image of God and given the whole shebang as a gift to be treasured.

What a stunning tableau this story paints, especially to a people in exile. Here they are subjugated to a foreign power, taken from their homes, and told that their God



is merely one of a multitude of competing Gods, and at the moment appears to be losing. From where they are sitting, they are far from home, with nothing to claim as their own, the world is filled with chaos, and their God is weak, and so are they.

But no, this creation narrative tells a different story. There is only one true God, who is powerful enough to create the world. And God's immense creative power was put to use to fashion a well-ordered world. This well-ordered world was gifted to all humanity. And they were created in the very image of God. Despite the appearance of the current dire circumstances, in actuality they are the children of God Almighty and they are very much at home in a world created for them.

It is as if they were children living in fear as they found themselves in rough and choppy waters; as if at any moment they could find themselves pulled under never to be seen again, forgotten by their God. And then they learn that the deeper reality is that all of the thrashing water they are experiencing is water sloshing back and forth in a bathtub created by the one who continues to claim them, to love them, and will never let them go. All of the painful drama they are experiencing is occurring within a much wider context.

Now, to be fair. Nothing in this story stopped their immediate horrifying predicament of being in captivity. But this vision of God's action and God's intention toward them granted them a wider lens by which to see their circumstances. And thus, they received the gift of hope. It is impossible to talk about the refugees of the Babylonian Captivity and not think as well of the tragedy of what has occurred on our border with Mexico and with refugees around the world.

I have no desire to stand up here and offer any political perspective on immigration policy. But we can all ache for the suffering that has touched the lives of these youngest ones. It would be glib to suggest they have no real worries because they exist in God's creation. But what I will say with absolute certainty is that these most vulnerable ones are not beyond God's reach, not beyond God's concern, and not beyond the dignity of being recognized as the beloved children of God.



It is fair to assume that few or any of us in this sanctuary have experienced the level of widespread disorientation and despair of those Israelite refugees or those children on the border. But there are indeed times in our lives when we feel lost. There are times when we feel far from home, geographically, or psychologically, or spiritually; times when illness or misfortune or failure threaten to consume us. There are times when we feel as if the forces of the world are pushing us to and fro. There are times when chaos appears to rule the day. There are times when God seems weak or at least uninterested in what is happening to us. There are times when we can find ourselves sitting in a place where hope is awfully hard to see.

This creation story can speak to us as well. We too are reminded that there is only one true God, who is powerful enough to create the world. And God's immense creative power was put to use to fashion a well-ordered world. And this well-ordered world was gifted to all humanity. And we were created in the very image of this God. Despite the appearance of the crises that enter our lives, we are the children of God Almighty and all of creation was set in motion for us. We too can feel as if the rough and choppy waters of this life may overwhelm us. When bad things happen to us we too can feel abandoned by God. And we too can learn that the deeper reality is that all of the thrashing water that we experience is merely the water sloshing back and forth in a bathtub created by our God.

To be clear, I am not pushing this metaphor to suggest that we have been promised a life free from pain and harm, and sometimes even devastating consequences. We all know better than that. But seeing our lives through this wide angle lens of our existence shows us that everything, the best and the worst, absolutely everything that occurs in all physical existence happens within our God's loving and generous hands that fashioned everything before time began. It is a hard truth that we are not shielded from tragedy in this life. But we are also gifted with the deep truth that there is no place in the world where we are separated from God's love.

I am sure those Israelites in exile wondered if they had been forced to journey beyond God's reach. Some wondered if God was to blame. Some wondered if



they were to blame and were being punished. All of them wondered, with the world turned upside down, what would happen next. I have wondered about all of these things myself as I have faced my own minor trials and tribulations.

Turning to the first chapter of Genesis we are told that there are several truths we can carry no matter what may come. God is in command as the creator of all that is or ever will be. God has taken the chaos and fashioned order out of it, even when we cannot see it. God has fashioned us in the very image of Godself. And, God has generously given us all of creation and continues to gift us with it on each new day.

There is no exile from God's good order. There is no exile from who we are as children of God. There is no exile from God's gifts to us. May we work and pray for a day when there is no exile to be found in this world for anyone, anywhere, in any way.

The most important map in our lives has nothing to do with property lines, or geography, or national boundaries. The most important map is metaphysical. It shows that we live our entire lives, no matter what may come, surrounded by the divine and in that place there is always hope. From where I sit that is a pretty darn good view.

Thanks be to God. Amen.