

Creativity

May 18, 2008
Edwards (Knox) United Church
Trinity Sunday

Genesis 1:1 - 2:4a

Read the passage: [The Message](#) or [The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#)

Matthew 28:16-20

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The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson

In both Genesis and the Psalm we have beautiful poetry that affirm that God is the Creator. God's power is ultimately defined as creative. And it is good power. It is persuasive power. It gives life. It transforms chaos into order, and it brings new life of death. It is the power of novelty. God's power is the source of entirely new possibilities.

To focus us, I have to remove some current problems in the reading of Genesis. It was meant to be read as a theological affirmation of the creative love of God. It was never meant to be read as the how of creation - it was not science in the way we understand science - it was about the why. It is a creation myth that affirms the dynamic creative power of creativity as part of how things become. God is one of the actors in the creative act. To get a scientific view - the how - then evolution is the best theory about how things become. It does not tell us why. Evolution gives us information of how things evolve, but it does not give us meaning. The poetry of Genesis does. Theologically we can affirm that God is involved in evolution.

It is important to read these passages as beautiful poetry of affirmation of the idea of this world as good and the place of God's redeeming activity. The poem takes us through the daily activity of God as a creative force of love. And at the end of each action God declares that what has happened to be good. The first step of creation is the creation of the beautiful and blessed world. This is our home. And in our home we are called to be stewards of this beautiful home.

In the story all life forms have an important role. God's says "let us create in our image." I take this as all life forms have some creativity. All life adds new possibilities to what will become, has influence in the process of creation. In the story humanity has a particular role in creation. It recognizes that our influence is greater than other life forms. This is what it means to name the plants and animals. With this naming comes responsibility. We misunderstand this because of the word dominion. We have taken it as control and domination. In the Hebrew it was a much more relational word. It is to care in the same way God cares. It is to recognize that we do have power of creativity and we are called to use it in the same way God uses God's power. It is not a matter of control or dominance but rather true power is love and persuasion. It is to recognize that all of life has some creative power, influence in what will become created goods. We are called to work for the common good of all of creation.

The story invites us to trust God. It reminds us that our ultimate loyalty is God. Idolatry is to forget this priority and to give our loyalty to that which perishes, to make the creature primary. It is to forget there is a difference between creative good and created goods. It is to worship the artifact rather than the source of creation. Sin is a life lived, no matter how nobly or well, in service to a power other than God's creative, transforming power.

Created goods are those things we create out of our aesthetic impulses. It can be a work of art, a piece of music, a garden, a job, in other words what we make and produce. True aesthetics is the creativity of God flowing through us. In our time, though, we get confused and we begin to worship the product or the artifact we create. They become ultimate in themselves. We see this most clearly in the world of entertainment. People get their identity and meaning not from the music or art but from the one who sings or produces - we worship or create an idol. We can also see this in a phrase - my country for better or worse. We see this in the process of creating the idea of democracy and then seeking to impose it on others by force. Democracy is a important insight and benefit however when we worship it as end in itself, we make war, as has happened in Iraq. The idea gives us permission because we forget it is only a created good not creativity itself. Making money as the meaning of life is another example of missing the point of creativity.

Our history is full of this confusion. We are victims of civilization as well as those who used civilization to victimize others. There is a difference of getting the benefits of a free society from trying to assimilate those different. We see this in our treatment of first nation people. There are benefits of education and skills that are needed for our modern world, but what we did was to worship our particular way of life and sought to impose it at the expense of their culture. We worshiped our created good as the ultimate truth of reality rather than one of many historical routes towards flourishing.

This worship of created goods is seen in how we live in this world. It is our interests - what is good for us - that have become the defining meaning of reality. In our relationship with other life forms we see them as useful to us - their meaning is what we give them and they are without any intrinsic value to themselves. Trees are to be taken care of because they deal with carbon dioxide - they are functional - instrumental to us. Our relationship with them denies any intrinsic value. This is the issue in care of food and animals, and there is a move to see that they are more than created goods, with their own intrinsic value. And when that is seen factory farming is called into question. We focus on quantity rather than quality. The texts make a simple theological point that God is the Creator and we are the creatures and let's not forget the order of the two statements. The idea of justice is we and nations do not possess divine rights - we are accountable to the standards of righteousness that were the will of God - the creation of beauty.

The idea of justice and mercy found in the prophets and Jesus are grounded in the beauty of and blessing of creation. They provide images that suggest the struggle for justice, mercy, and peace are grounded in the life-giving waters and fertile gardens of earth. Given this good earth our treatment of it becomes how we are judged. We are called to be caretakers - note care of the earth and those in it is the meaning of caretaker. We take care. Jesus call is a different orientation to the world; it is a challenge to the powers that be. This is the peace of God, and not the kind of so-called peace that the world offers.

As well the texts reaffirm that God works through us. Matthew reminds the reader that Jesus has invested in us the transforming power of creativity. We continue the task of love in this world.

God has a dual nature of giving and receiving - offering beauty and working with the beauty we create. God works creativity with our created good, offering in each nanosecond new possibilities for us to actualize. God's power is one planting and sowing - persuasion is the ground of God's power. Out of the aim toward beauty, which calls us to depth, we create what is to be. A more profound and higher unity comes in the experience of God's creative aim, giving to the world and receiving from the world. God is seen as ultimate because all things are brought together in God's experience. God feels what we have done - for good or ill.

It is important to see that there can be wonderful possibilities for the future. But that does not mean optimism about the future - we see too many unrealized possibilities. What the creation story does tell us is we have hope. Hope based on the creativity and inexhaustible wealth of possibilities God offers. God is the source of creative beauty to be actualized in this world. We are those called to help actualize that beauty. We are those who believe that all we are and do is loved by God and taken forever into the divine

life. Our longing for a positive outcome of history is grounded in our relationship with the creative good. It helps us be faithful to our task as caretakers.

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