

June 18, 2023 Third Sunday after Pentecost

Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31 John 1:1-9

"Creation: How We Get Saved"

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The past two weeks we have considered the two accounts of the creation found in Genesis. Today, I am preaching on the first chapter of John. In terms of creation stories it may not get as much publicity as the Genesis narratives but it too is an important telling of how our world was fashioned.

Written at the close of the first century, the gospel of John seeks to interpret exactly who Jesus Christ is for a group of followers still struggling to understand what it means for someone to be the Son of God. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke give us a genealogy, birth narratives and baptisms, John opens his gospel with a wide-angle lens view of our Savior. The opening lines are poetic in tone and cosmic in nature. And it is no accident that they mimic the opening of the book of Genesis. "In the beginning..."

Often when we think about who God is we make the assumption that there is some chronological unfolding of the three members of the Trinity. We think about God the Creator existing since before time began and Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit following at some temporal point later on. We can fall into this assumption because of the layout of scripture. In the Old Testament we hear nearly exclusively of God the Creator. And then the New Testament brings us much talk of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

But it is good to be reminded that this chronological ordering is not true. The reality that all three members of the Trinity were present at creation has much to teach us about God's intention regarding redemption.

As we read through the Old Testament there are numerous accounts of God's frustration with humanity. There are times when it feels as if God is considering walking away from this whole experiment of creation and abandoning us. And to be fair, I could not blame the divine for giving some serious thought to that option. After all, you and I are rather frustrating creatures. We have been given so much yet we whine that we deserve more. We make promises to each other and to our God and are not all that consistent in keeping them. Sometimes we apologize for our mistakes but then we just make the same mistakes all over again. Could we really blame God if the divine chose to just scrap this entire creation project and work on something new and improved? After Cain killing Abel, and the Golden Calf, faulty kings and feckless people, why not just start over?

This is probably not a thought to ponder on a sleepless night at three AM. But if you ever do go there, if you are ever up at three AM and wondering if God could or should give up on this world or could or should give up on you or me, this text from John is good to remember. As I said a moment ago, this text has a lot to teach us about God's intention regarding redemption. Let's hear the first several verses one more time. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him and without him not one thing came into being..."

When we speak of the Trinity we tend to discuss the specific role each person plays. We talk of the first person of the Trinity, God, as being the one who creates the world. We talk about the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, as the one who redeems the world. And we talk about the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, as the one who is present in the world with us. In general, these are helpful designations but their simplicity runs the risk of skewing our understanding of God.

In this text, John pushes back on these Trinitarian boundaries. It is not just God in the first person who engages in the creation. Jesus Christ is right there in the beginning as well, and not only present but active and essential. We are told, "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." All of creation passes through the hands of Jesus Christ. The one who promises to bring redemption also fashions creation. The theologian Robert Farrar Capon says it like this, "...the Word who makes the world is identical with the Word who saves the world." (Capon, p. 11)

What that says to me is that not a single thing was created without a plan for it being saved. Sometimes when we read the Bible it seems as if we are constantly messing up and God is scurrying behind us trying to catch up and fix all that is broken. It is as if we are careless children in a china shop and God is the harried shop-keep following us around trying to catch the vases we knock over and attempting to glue together the pieces that drop and shatter. Is there any possible way this mess can all be fixed?

But, in essence, God has been ahead of us the whole time. There is nothing and no one that has not been hardwired to be

repaired. Our very DNA is designed to bring healing to all of the ways we get bruised by the world and most especially by ourselves. There is no place we can journey where God's saving grace is not already waiting for us. There is no timeline which runs out on us for receiving God's grace because it is timeless. It was created before time even began.

It is as if this whole messy, sometimes wonderful, sometimes dreadful life we all share is like a game of existential Chutes and Ladders. We all know that life comes with its inevitable share of ups and downs, some foreseen and many not. But when the game-board was originally drawn up the final move always lands us on a ladder that elevates us, that restores us, that heals us, that brings us into perfect relationship with our God and with each other.

This creation story particularly speaks to our condition right now. We live in an age of anxiety in which we fear what will come next in this rapidly changing world. This uncertainty can be exhausting as we constantly spin our wheels to be prepared for a future that is beyond our envisioning. This uncertainty can creep into our spiritual lives as well. With so much up for grabs who is to say where we stand with our God. We have been told Jesus Christ has come to redeem us, to make our relationship right with God. But what if we fall through the cracks? What if we do not get things just right? What if there is some special detail we need to attend to in order to receive God's saving grace in Jesus Christ? What if we somehow just get lost along the way?

Recognizing that Jesus Christ stood at the beginning of time helping to fashion all of existence means there is no crack into which we can fall. Every atom of our world is infused with

God's grace. It is built into each one of us. We could not misplace God's grace in our lives any more than we could wake up one day and find ourselves to be a rhinoceros rather than a human.

The theologian Edward Schillebeeckx expressed it like this, "Christology is creation underlined, concentrated, and condensed..." (Fox, p. 118) In other words Jesus Christ is inside of everything that is, including and especially you and me. Creation was set in motion to be redeemed.

As we often do, I am sure the early church struggled with comprehending how any single being could be both fully human and fully God. It is an oxymoron which will continue to perplex us. But the essence of who Jesus is, all God and all human, is an arrow pointing toward God's plan for us all. In the end there will be no great divide between who we are as limited mortals and who God is as the boundless one of all existence and beyond. Not that we will be equivalent to God, or even be Godlike, but that we will recognize that we are so close to the divine that we are actually welcomed into the very heart of who God is.

The metaphysics of it all are beyond understanding. But that is not the important part. The important part is that each of us was created precisely so we would be redeemed. One could call it a DNA of redemption. Our destiny in God's loving embrace was laid out as surely as the color of our eyes and the shape of our noses. In a world where uncertainty and anxiety often appear to reign we can hold on to this one truth and know we are on solid ground. We have been saved since the beginning.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Capon, Robert Farrar, *The Fingerprints of God*, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000.

Fox, Matthew, *Original Blessing*, Bear and Company, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1983.