

**June 4, 2023**

**Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church**

**Genesis 1:1-2:3**

**"Creation: How We Find Ourselves in God's Hands"**

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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 three weeks I will be preaching on the different ways scripture portrays God's creation of the world. The two creation stories in Genesis seek to provide a map to the nation of Israel. They 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, a map of where we live and how 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 worshiped? 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. We are created in the very image of God and given the whole shebang as a gift to be treasured.

What a stunning tableau this story paints, particularly 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, who at the moment appears to be losing. From where they are sitting, they are far from home, with nothing to claim as their own, and the world is filled with chaos. 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. Despite the appearance of the current dire circumstances, 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 merely 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 intention toward them granted

them a wider lens by which to see their circumstances. And thus, they received the gift of hope.

Today we live in a world of displacement. It is impossible to talk about the refugees of the Babylonian Captivity and not think as well of the tragedy of refugees around the world today. 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.

Few or any of us in this sanctuary have experienced the level of widespread disorientation and despair of those Israelite refugees or refugees around the world. 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 can feel distant from what is happening to us.

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 gift it to us. 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 the deeper reality that all of the thrashing water we experience is merely the water sloshing back and forth in a bathtub created by the divine.

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. The very same hands that fashioned everything before time began. The truth is we are not shielded from tragedy in this life. But we are gifted with the deeper 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. We have all wondered about these things.

The first chapter of Genesis gives us 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. 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 presence. 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 earthly 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 this place there is always hope. From where I stand that is  
a pretty darn good view.

Thanks be to God. Amen.