



God of Wonders

Genesis 1

TRINITY PULPIT

 Lord, Our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8:1) Words penned by the man we call King David. A man who was a King, a warrior, a shepherd, a poet, and musician. Whether this Psalm was written when David was a young boy out in the field with his sheep, or sitting around a fire with his troops, or in reflection from his palace in Jerusalem, this Psalm calls our attention to the greatness of our God. This God of wonders has created the heavens, the moon and stars, and has set all things in place. Yet, this God has also created you and me. Not only has God created you and me, but also this God – who is above all things – gives care and attention to you and me. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

We are spending time this fall considering the question of why we exist as a congregation. What is our purpose? Before we think about what we do, when we do it, and how we do it, we must know our why. Last week I suggested that John 3:16 is the description of our why. Let's read this verse again:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever would believe in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

We begin where Jesus began with this declaration. We begin with God. For God...

I have asked our ministerial staff this question, "What would we want every member of Trinity to be able to know and articulate to others?" This sermon series has this as a goal. We are going to explore our why; but by doing so, I hope we can explore the basics of our faith that we can affirm and share. So, we begin in the only place we can begin and that is with God. We begin where we should begin. We be-

gin at the very beginning of creation. We begin as God's word begins – in the beginning God.

The affirmation with which the Bible begins is "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." We might say that this verse is an affirmation of the beginning before the beginning. Before we speak of our earth beginning we speak of God.

As you know, there is a tension between science and faith. It is sad because science and faith should not be in tension. In fact, most Christian Scientists I know speak of how science does not lead you from faith but to faith. One of the problems with this tension is that we make the assumption that science and faith are opposing ideas. So, when some people of faith insist that the world is much younger than a scientist might suggest, there is tension. There are those who concluded that if the world is really millions of years old as science teaches us, then there is no way that Genesis is true; and if Genesis is not true, then the Bible must not be true; and if the Bible is not true, then even the claims about Jesus are not true. I would suggest that such line of thought creates a very fragile faith in not only the Bible but also, more importantly, in the person of Jesus.

I don't see creation and science in opposition, and I especially do not see the story of creation in Genesis in contradiction with science. This is because the story of Genesis is not a story of science but a story of faith. The story of creation we find in Genesis is an affirmation of faith — faith in a God who was before the beginning.

Our why begins with God and God begins before the beginning. Genesis 1 affirms that God is the creator of all things and before anything came to be, God is.

So, what should we say about God as

creator? Let me share four affirmations we can make as we affirm God as creator.

First, affirming God as creator means there is a distinction between God and creation. God and creation are not one and the same. Creation points to God but creation is not God. One of the best interpretations I have ever heard about Genesis 1 is that it is an affirmation that God is God and your god is not. My Old Testament professor, Max Rogers, would say Genesis 1 is about God's people saying no matter what you create as a god in this created order, our God created your god. Thus your god is not God.

To those who worshipped the heavens, the stars, moon, and sun: Genesis 1 claims our God created your god.

To those who worshipped the gods of the sea and gods of the land: our God created your god.

To those who would worship the animals of the land or the animals of the sea: our God created your god.

To those who would worship a man or a woman as a god: our God created your god.

The first affirmation of creation is our God was before all things and thus anything in creation is not god. God is the God of wonders; God is holy. That is, God is apart from creation itself.

This affirmation causes us to realize that we are still making gods of the created order. I don't know how many of us bow down to the sun or moon, although we do lay down prostrate before the sun. I don't know how many of us worship the land, although we do sometimes love the landscape. I don't know how many of us would build a temple to the ocean or mountains, but we sure work hard to place our temple in those locations. I don't know how many of us would bow down and worship another person, but there are surely people and relationships we put before God.

Yet, the affirmation that God is creator calls us to a new understanding that God and creation are not of the same essence. They are not one and the same. God is above and before and different. Thus, any God that we might create is a lesser god.

This, of course, is an ongoing problem for hu-

manity. It is sometimes easier for us to make a god of our own. One we can see and experience. It has always been a temptation. This is why we find God instructing the people in the Ten Commandments that you shall not worship a god of your own creation. This is why we find the prophets making fun of other gods, mocking wood and stone to speak, if they are gods. This is why Jesus says you cannot worship both God and mammon — money and things. There is only one God worthy of worship and that is the creator God.

God of wonders — the God of creation — affirms that God and creation are not the same.

Yet, the God of creation does mean that in creation God is revealed. In Romans, Paul is making a point that we all are accountable to God even if no one has told us about God. Everyone can know that God exists even if by the very glory of creation. So Paul writes:

¹⁸The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. (Romans 1:18-25)

Paul again repeats the idea that God and creation is not the same thing. That humanity has traded the worship of God for the things that are created by God. However, Paul also asserts that we can know

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that God exists by the observance of creation. Paul writes that all of God's invisible qualities and divine nature can be understood through that which is made.

So in Psalm 8, David considers creation and does not worship the creation, but quickly turns his attention to the God of creation.

I have two favorite instagram follows. The first is National Geographic. The pictures of our world are just amazing. The other is Chris Burkhard a 32-year-old photographer explorer. Growing up on the beaches of California he was an avid water sport enthusiast. At 19 he started taking pictures. His passion for sport, exploring and photography has taken him to the ends of earth. His photographs remind me daily just how small I can make my world and just how big and glorious is this world that God created.

Creation reminds us that God is not creation, but creation also reminds us that God is. Francis Collins, who was the acclaimed scientist and headed the Genome Project, speaks of his own choice to follow Jesus in an interview with PBS. In that interview, he speaks of his rejection of faith at Yale and later in life. He speaks of putting faith into a category of unscientific and unreasonable. Then as a practicing physician he began to have questions he could not answer. He watched people of faith face death. He decided he had rejected what he never really had considered. So he began to read and consider God and faith even as an academic endeavor. One of the people he read was C. S. Lewis. He read *Mere Christianity*. As he considered Lewis' argument, he said that he did not want to come to the conclusion that God existed and that Jesus was real or the way. Then he said this in the interview:

I struggled with that for many months, really resisting this decision, going forward, and going backward. Finally, after about a year, I was on a trip to the northwest, and on a beautiful afternoon hiking in the Cascade Mountains, where the remarkable beauty of the creation around me was so overwhelming, I felt, "I cannot resist this another moment. This is something I have really longed for all my life without realizing it, and now I've got the chance to say yes." So I said yes. I was 27. I've never turned back. That was the most significant moment in my life.

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The great Old Testament Theologian, Walter Bruggemann, writes in his commentary on Genesis, "(this text) makes a theological claim that the word of God has been spoken and this word changes reality. This claim is not historical but theological and about the character of God, who is bound to God's world and the world is bound to God."

We are reminded when we read the Genesis story of creation, that humankind is the height of God's creation. Humanity is something different than the rest of the created order. In humanity we find the likeness of God and we find the very image of God. Thus God is bound to us and we are bound to God.

We will talk about what this means when we consider the doctrine of humanity. However, it is suffice to say that God is bound to us and we are bound to God because we are God's creation. When it comes to creation, God is all in. When we come to Noah in Genesis, we find that in a very short time in the story, humans have gone from without sin to so sinful and wicked that God is grieving that he ever created humanity in the first place. So, the flood story is about a new creation or a creation 2.0. It is about starting over through the family of Noah. God brings the rain and the floods but creation is not destroyed. Creation is renewed and there is a new beginning. God does not just speak creation out of existence even as God had spoke creation into existence. God acts as the result of our actions and God renews the creation with a new start. In the same way, the book of Revelation says that there will

be a new heaven and a new earth and they will be one. The idea there is that creation again is completely renewed. All things become new.

This is significant because it reminds us that no matter how creation goes, God is bound to his creation and we are bound to God.

The last thought I want to make is that God is still creating. When we say that God is the God of creation, we are saying that this is a character of God. So throughout the Bible we find the terms of creation. Jesus would say you must be born again. Paul would describe following Jesus as becoming a

new creation. Using the term Chrysalis. The idea of a cocoon and a new creature coming out of the cocoon. In Revelation, we come to a new creation.

God is creator but that does not mean that God created and then sent the world on its way. God as creator means that this is the very nature of God and so God is always creating and recreating.

This week we have seen the power of God's creation. The hurricane that has caused such destruction on our coast is a reminder that creation is a powerful force. Please do not hear me say that God caused or causes hurricanes. God created this world with its eco-systems and part of this system are things like tornadoes, earthquakes and hurricanes. These natural disasters are just that. They are natural as part of God's creation. We know very well when we build our cities and our houses on the ocean, rivers and sounds that we are taking a risk. It is the risk of creation. So, this week we have seen the chaos and the uncertainty of creation. Yet, in the midst of the chaos we have witnessed the re-creation of God.

When we read the first words of the creation story we find these words:

² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. ³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. ⁶ And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." ⁷ So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸ God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day. ⁹ And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

(Genesis 1:2-10)

In the beginning there was nothingness. There was chaos. God hovered above the chaos and God did what no one else could do in the chaos. He brings order and good.

Why does the Genesis story begin with chaos? I think that the Bible is trying to tell us something about life as well as creation. There is chaos. There has always been chaos in this world and there will always be, until there is a new creation. Yet, above the chaos, not causing the chaos but working with and in the chaos, God is hovering and moving. The word hovering is a word that means moving back and forth with possibility for action.

I attended the funeral service for one of our members' father this week. It was on Tuesday night when everyone was getting ready for the chaos that was coming. It was in one of our eastern North Carolina towns. Everyone was on his or her way from the coast as the traffic indicated. I was obviously traveling the wrong direction as I traveled there. While everyone else around them were preparing for a storm, this family and family of faith were walking through the storm of grief. I am sure their minds were on the storm that was coming. Yet they took the time to come and remember their friend and support this family. The worship began "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." The soloist sang Amazing Grace and sang out "The Lord has promised good to me." We stood and sang, "Joyful Joyful we adore Thee." As we left the organist played "Our God our Help in Ages Past, Our hope for years to come."

Who does this kind of thing? What kind of people worship in the storm and in the storm of life? The kind of people who believe that there is a God beyond creation. The kind of people that believe by faith that the God of creation is bound to his creation. The kind of people who believe that no matter the chaos, God hovers and moves and is always creating and re-creating. ▲



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