

Created for a Purpose
June 1, 2008

Genesis 1:26-2:3:

(v. 26) Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female the Lord created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Then the heavens and the earth were finished and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that the Lord had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

One: This is the Word of the Lord. **All: Thanks be to God!**

The opening thirty-four verses of Genesis are fertile ground for deep theological insight. There are eleven hymns in our Presbyterian hymnal based on Genesis 1. We have already sung a couple of them: *Morning Has Broken* and *For the Beauty of the Earth*. More hymns find their inspiration in the opening verses of Genesis than any other Scripture text. This narrative's appeal is universal because all of us have an opportunity to enjoy the beauty of God's creation.

Even though the creation story is well known, it has been frequently misunderstood. It is important to say what the text is and what it is not. Genesis 1 poetically speaks to the brilliance and the majesty of our Creator: its intent is to lead us to worship and praise God for the Lord's handiwork. It is not, however, supposed to be a scientific textbook. Genesis is not claiming that the world was created in six literal twenty-four hour periods.

There are times when taking the Bible literally means that we are not taking the Bible seriously. We do not read Shakespearean poetry to try to understand the science behind why our hearts seem to beat faster when we are in love. We recite the great bard's lyrics to get a glimpse into the joyful experience of love. Similarly, we do not read Genesis to understand precisely how God formed molecules and divided atoms. We read the creation story to testify that God is the unseen hand behind the cosmos and the author for all life, including our own.

This week, I came across a story about a family of mice who lived all their lives in a large piano. To them in their piano-world came the music of the instrument, filling all the dark spaces with sound and harmony. At first the mice were impressed by it. They drew comfort and wonder from the thought that there was someone who made the music—though invisible to them—above, yet close to them. They loved to think of the Great Player whom they could not see.

Then one day a daring mouse climbed up part of the piano and returned very thoughtful. He had found out how the music was made. Wires were the secret; tightly stretched wires of graduated lengths, which trembled and vibrated. They must revise all their old beliefs: only a very few could muster the strength to continue believing in the Unseen Player.

Later, another explorer carried the explanation further. Hammers were now the secret, numbers of hammers dancing and leaping on the wires. This was a more complicated theory, but it all went to show that they lived in a purely mechanical and mathematical world. The Unseen Player came to be thought of as a myth. But the pianist continued to play.¹ Of course, the unseen pianist is a metaphor for God.

The Bible testifies that God is the unseen hand guiding the universe. Notice from the very beginning, God is already there. The Bible takes for granted that God exists. It is not even worth debating to the biblical authors because God has been so real in their lives. The Bible does not begin by trying to prove God's presence; it instead puts on display God's majestic creative power. Knowing that God exists provides the basis for our purpose in life.

Rick Warren's book [The Purpose Driven Life](#) was on *The New York Times Best Seller List* for over 170 consecutive weeks. Although I disagree with some of the theological claims in the book, I wholeheartedly affirm Warren's basic premise. I am excited whenever people read any book else that gets them asking questions like, "Why are we here? What is God's intention for my life?" The popularity of [The Purpose Driven Life](#) reflects how many people believe that God has created us for a purpose. I firmly believe that we are created for a purpose and we discover that purpose by following God.

Life is not random. Genesis 1 tells us of how God has a plan for the cosmos and we are part of it. Every day, when God is finished creating the stars, or the seas, or the animals, Genesis repeats the same refrain, "and God saw that it was good." On the sixth day of creation, when God makes human beings in God's own image, the text adds one little and important word. It states, "and God saw that it was VERY good." God's crowning achievement in creation is making human beings, people like you and me.

We are special to God. We have been made in the image of God. What does it mean to be made in the image of God? How can we become our best selves, the people God created us to be? In part it is to say that the presence of God is deep within us. We see the image of God in our passion to fight for justice, in our longings for reconciliation and peace, our acts of kindness and mercy, and our commitment to leaving this world a

¹ I found this illustration on the website www.bible.org under sermon illustrations about the existence of God. It was reprinted from *The London Observer*.

better place than we found it. We see the image of God in our own hunger to encounter God's presence.

Unfortunately sin creeps into our lives, keeping us from being the person God created us to be. St Augustine said about his journey back toward God's presence, "It was not you, O God, who was absent from me. Rather, I was absent from myself and therefore from you at the center of my being." To discover the image of God within is to return to our true home, the place where we are most authentically ourselves. God wants us to become our best selves.

Today we are recognizing our graduating high school seniors. You graduates are preparing for a transition as you say goodbye to your high school days you head off to school or the next step in your journey of faith. Since the dawn of creation, God has given all of us free will. I suspect that many of you will spread your wings and you may even surprise yourself with what you are able to achieve. You will also make some missteps along the way: that is okay; it is part of being human. I hope that you seniors, and all of us, will remember that we are created in the image of God and that we can find contentment and purpose in discovering the person God has created us to be. And when you return to Martinsville, you will always have a church home here at First Presbyterian Church, full of people ready to give you encouragement and support.

How can we find our way back to God when life throws us a curveball and we are not sure how to dig ourselves out? When life's storms come at us, where do we turn? Rodrigo Borja, who became president of Ecuador from 1988-1992, was imprisoned before his political career began. Borja had fought for democracy in Ecuador and was arrested. Without a trial, he was thrown into a cold dungeon with no light and no window. For three days, he endured the solitary fear and darkness that can drive a person mad. Just when he was tempted to lose hope, the huge steel door opened and someone crept into his cell. Borja heard the person working on something in the opposite corner. Then the man closed the door and disappeared. Minutes later the room blazed with light. The man had connected electricity to the broken light fixture. "From that moment," explained President Borja, "my imprisonment had meaning because I could see."²

In Genesis, God said let there be light and there was light. Light is a powerful symbol. In the light, we see the truth, how things really are. When evil is brought into the light, we have the resources to fight against the darkness. The light can be shed on our fears so that we are not afraid. Where there is disorder, chaos, depression, hopelessness, God wants to shine the light. Even amidst the dark despair of a cold prison cell, God's light offers a way out. God has created us for a holy purpose and illuminates our path so that we can live into our identity as people created in the image of God. Thanks be our Creator God! Amen.

² Edward K. Rowell, 1001 Quotes, Illustrations, & Humorous Stories, p. 369.