

# *Sermon Text for March 1, 2015*

by

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John 1:1-5, Genesis 1:1-5

“In the beginning”

Welcome to the beginning of our sermon series on Genesis. We've created an environment where we hope that all has been stripped away so that we are able to focus on that which matters, that which was present from the very beginning. On the day when God began to create there was nothing, some say *ex nihilo*, out of nothing God moved, hovered, to create something. Today, I pray we will focus on that which really matters.

We have been trained to only see certain things in certain places. In order to hear beautiful music you go to a concert hall. In order to experience God you go where, to church. If you want to hear the best violinist in the world, Grammy award winning Joshua Bell you go to Carnegie Hall. Well, he did an experiment once, he took his \$3.5 million violin to a metro station, that's the subway in DC and put down his case and began playing non-stop a 45 minute piece that he had played the week before at the Library of Congress to a packed house for people who paid hundreds of dollars to hear him play.

During those 45 minutes 7 people stopped to hear him play among the thousands who passed by, including a child who wanted to linger and was pulled by his parent away, chastised because they had to go to the next appointment.

We've been trained to see brilliance and beauty in certain places and not at the subway or bus station. Have we been similarly trained to see God only in certain places, with all the trappings, with all the seasonal decorations, and all of the fanfare. How do we see God when things are not as we planned? A member of the church stopped by on Friday a bit distraught and asked, so how is this going to work on Sunday? What are we going to do without a bulletin, how will we know what comes next. The implication is, how will we know how to worship God without those trappings that we are accustomed to? What all do we need to experience a living God? Both Genesis and John say the only thing we need in order to experience God is the Word. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Do we need any of this, or are we able to experience the hovering God outside of these walls chomping at the bit to get something done.

Sometimes we are more focused on telling people that they need to get to church, or Bible Study, or prayer breakfast, or you choose whatever program we have that gathers people in to experience the presence of God, instead of simply asking them what they need so they can experience God where they are.

This is a great time to be here at First Presbyterian. Look around you, what do you sense? Do you sense emptiness, do you feel a void, like something is missing, the absence of God even, or do you sense an anticipation, an energy, an opportunity that is going to present itself, that's being created even as we speak, if we just put ourselves at God's disposal. You see, in the beginning, in the emptiness, it wasn't sad, it wasn't a downer, it was brimming with potential and opportunities and excitement for what was to come. Let's read the beginning of Genesis and hear about the beginning.

### **READ**

Genesis is a simple story, it is a succession of simple stories that start at creation and go through Adam and Eve, through the tower of Babel, through Noah and onto Abraham and the Patriarchs. I once had a preacher friend of mine say a sermon isn't a sermon until you take it to the cross, until Jesus is lifted high.

Genesis comes from a Greek word which means beginning. If you notice that is how both Genesis and John start, in the beginning, *ho geneto*. As we go on this journey together through Genesis you have to be able to make a link every Sunday between the Old Testament Scripture that we read and the New Testament Scripture that will come first like today in John chapter 1. Genesis has to be read in light of our redeemer Jesus Christ. We are people of the book, of both the OT and the NT and we have to make that link and we cannot go any further if today you don't commit to making the extra effort of connecting these two Scriptures.

Otherwise you have great stories in Genesis but the power of the saving act of Jesus Christ, who makes us who we are, is stripped away. Today we will see that from the beginning and in the beginning Redemption, salvation, creation are all tied together when read in light of the New Testament. So then let's start as Julie Andrews started at the very beginning for it's a very good place to start.

As I was reading John coming down the sanctuary did you think that I was reading from Genesis or did you know it was the Gospel of John? They are very, very similar. John speaks

of nothing coming into being, nothing was created without the presence of the Word. Jesus, John states, is the Word made flesh.

The Word is at the center of it all from the beginning of time. Different traditions emphasize different aspects of Sunday morning worship. Anyone want to guess what Presbyterians believe is the central worship act in our time together? It's not the music, even though we love to sing together. It's not the prayers, it's leaving room in the service for the movement of the Holy Spirit in creative ways. At the center of worship for us is the Word. The Word of God written, the Word of God spoken. This is the simplicity of the service today, it is just the spoken Word, just as God created by speaking and His creatures responded in obedience.

The earliest Christian church understood the centrality of the Word. Jesus spoke in his home synagogue and was driven out. Paul spoke and argued in Athens. The first Christian martyr was Stephen who spoke to Word and it aroused such passion that it led to his death. No one has been called on the carpet for ending every service with Let There Be Peace on Earth, but rather the words we use can motivate or alienate.

In Genesis, as we begin our series today, we don't find ourselves in pro-creation, but rather pre-creation. Genesis begins in the Hebrew not with a beginning and an end. It doesn't begin, In the Beginning God created. That would be past tense. The Hebrew expresses a tension that this creation thing is still taking place and we are witnessing the start of something that continues. Two words are used to start it off and both have beginning as their root. When God began the beginning would be a good way to say it.

Before God speaks, or before the presence of that Word do you see what is happening. We find the Spirit of God hovering over the waters. Hovering, used one other time in Deuteronomy to describe an eagle hovering over her young. The volunteer at our welcome center had her ipad and a live stream of an eagles' nest. Two eagles were in the nest taking turns keeping the egg safe and warm. Hovering implies looking for opportunities, waiting for what comes next with anticipation. Hovering implies not wanting to miss what comes next because we're on this, we're ready.

The author of Genesis also uses the juxtaposition of light and darkness to describe these first verses in Genesis. Three times the word darkness is mentioned and God then creates something to be juxtaposed against that darkness and that which God creates and which is mentioned 5 times, as opposed to darkness 3 times is: light. We are not talking sun and moon

here, that comes later, we are not talking stars here, that comes later. What is this light which God has to separate from the darkness? Let's see, I think John helps us out here.

John also wrote his Gospel with a theme in mind combating a 1<sup>st</sup> century heresy that was as dangerous as the early Israelite battle against a polytheistic culture. John here from the very first verse is establishing the fact that Jesus Christ is God. That the second person of the Trinity was just as present at creation as he was in Bethlehem. That Jesus Christ was just as present over the chaos of the formless void as he was on the cross of Calvary. Jesus is the one God present in the beginning. If you can start with that basic premise then we can move on with John.

Look at the Scripture: In the beginning...Nothing was created...In creation we see the salvation story played out in redemption, sacrifice, love, grace. It is absolutely an exclusive claim because we believe that in Jesus Christ, and only in Jesus Christ, do we find salvation. But it is also an inclusive claim in that it is open and free to every single person on earth. God so loved the world that he created it, from the very beginning he loved it. God created us in his image, all of us and he loves us beyond belief. That is the inclusivity that was present from the very beginning. In Jesus Christ, this is John's claim, we have the full and complete revelation of our God the creator.

Also in John, like in Genesis, you have this same juxtaposition between light and darkness. The question we asked in Genesis is what is this light that seems as its only source the creator himself, no explanation? Look at vs. 4, John calls this light life. What begins as chaos and darkness God, and only God is about to bring about order and light.

Today the good news is that Jesus Christ begins to create out of grace and compassion. What John teaches us is that life without Jesus Christ is darkness. If light is life, you can imagine what darkness is, its opposite, or death. We see that all through Scripture. It is as if from the beginning death was also present. It is not a new phenomenon. It is something which God has used us to combat from the beginning of time.

That darkness manifests itself in each of us as sin. From the beginning, sin has been present. Our lives reflect in many ways the power that sin has. Because of our sin, because of the darkness, we need our creator to renew and reshape us. We need a redeemer, someone who can drive out the darkness. We can't do it by ourselves because the more we try, the darker things get. We need someone to give us life.

Hear and believe the good news of the Gospel. In the beginning it was Friday, and Friday was a dark day. Our Savior was whipped, stripped, persecuted and oppressed and hung on a cross and died. The sun itself recognized how dark of a day it was so it hid behind the moon. Darkness covered the land.

But early on Sunday morning, oh that glorious Sunday. Early on Sunday morning when the dew was still wet on the grass, early on Sunday morning before the rooster crowed, early on Sunday morning before the buggies hit the streets of Lancaster County, early on Sunday morning Jesus broke the spell and the hold of darkness forever and filled this world with light and life. He took your life and re-created it and washed it clean.

And you thought we were just talking about Genesis, we are talking about Salvation. There was always purpose and direction in creation. The first two verses in Genesis 1 and 2 contain 7 words each. And even if there seems to be chaos and darkness in your life, God has a purpose and order for each of our lives as well.

This God of creation certainly did not create, stop and then step outside. No, the God of creation is the same God who saw the founding of FPC 183 years ago. This God of creation is the same who has overseen the birth and development of our food bank to something that this church can rally around as we reach out in tangible ways with the love of God. This God of creation is the same God who gave us a vision for this church that is not satisfied with merely being a worshipping community, but rather a refuge and a safe haven for people who tired and lonely and don't fit in and want to find a place where they can.

The God of Genesis and Creation is the same God who is creating and starting new beginnings here among us. God is able to this day create order out of the chaos, work change in broken relationships, shape love in situations of enmity and hatred. In the midst of this creation we find that God continues to speak.

You may be in a state of chaos and darkness around you. You may be waiting, some patiently, some less patiently, for the light to shine. Jesus Christ if you will receive him, has beat the darkness, has battled death and won and has given us the victory in return. Now I know that some of you, many of you feel like our country has gone back in time and has embraced the darkness. There is chaos and things seem as if it is a bit rudderless and the light is hard to see. You have been praying faithfully for God to bring light, to change the situation, and so far, only darkness is seen.

Look at Scripture and take consolation and find hope when time after time, the people of God call upon his name and he answers. Time after time when darkness covers the land, God responds in a way that often surprises and uses people that you may never imagine he would use. May God bless us and keep us as we claim the light and claim the victory in his name, and never allow darkness to have the final say. Amen.