

Sermon Text for May 30, 2021

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Genesis 1:1-2, John 1:1-18
“In the beginning”

We find ourselves in our stories of the Bible. We have seen Deborah, and the Tower of Babel and today we look at the story of creation, on this day when we celebrate the Trinity, and also as our nation honors our fallen veterans. So we have a lot to cover this morning, so buckle in. I preached on these verses in February of 2015 when we began our sermon series in Genesis. That Sunday morning we turned the lights down a bit, we stripped down the sanctuary, no bulletins, no music, nothing except the spoken Word. What all do we need to experience a living God?

This is a great time to be here at First Presbyterian. As we look to come out of a very, very difficult time in the history of our nation and in the history of our church, what are you sensing right now? We aren't anywhere near where we were with numbers when we began worshipping at home for over a year. 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 creation and how God was present at creation, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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Genesis has so many good stories, 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.

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*. Genesis has to be read in light of our redeemer Jesus Christ. That's why we included the John Scripture for today. 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. As we make our way through the stories of the Bible if the story isn't the one that comes across as the most important, the story of Jesus, then we are simply missing the point.

Otherwise you have great stories and they teach great lessons, 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 at the very beginning for it's a very good place to start.

John and Genesis are very, very similar as they begin. John speaks of nothing coming into being, nothing was created without the presence of the Word. Jesus, John states, is the Word made flesh. We see that in vs.14 and we see also the presence of the Word at creation. On this Trinity Sunday we see the presence of all three, the Son who is present and the Spirit which is present as it hovers over the water.

The Word is at the center of it all from the beginning of time. Different traditions emphasize different aspects of Sunday morning worship. I know I've said this before but does 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.

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 Lystra and was stoned. The first Christian martyr was Stephen who spoke the Word and it aroused such passion that it led to his death.

In our Genesis Scripture we don't find ourselves in pro-creation, but rather pre-creation. We aren't going to get into the debate of creationism vs. evolution. I think both can work. What we do know for sure is that God created. 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 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 1st 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.

And you thought we were just talking about creation, we are talking about Salvation. There was always purpose and direction in creation. 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 189 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 are tired and lonely and don't fit in and want to find a place where they can. This God of creation has made us the heart of the borough as we reach out to families and children in ways that we never thought possible.

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.