

THE FIRST DAY
Genesis 1:1-5
January 8, 2012

Where does one begin? The obvious and most often offered advice is – at the beginning.

It's a New Year . . . clean slate, new start, a new beginning. So the lection and we start at the beginning.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . .” Who wrote this? Who was there to see it, witness it?

No one, of course, so who wrote it? Why and in what circumstances? How was it “remembered?”

Knowing the context of any text can provide insight and fresh application. The words, “In the beginning . . .” are so familiar we often do not pause to consider the context before we nod (hopefully not falling asleep) and quickly file it away.

Context is important. “See you later,” can mean one thing when tossed over the shoulder as you leave the office after an ordinary day. It can mean quite another when whispered by the bedside of a dying friend.

“Pig!” the driver of another car shouts at you coming around a curvy road can be an insult or when you round the curve you discover a pig in the middle of the road. An insult? Or a warning?

To get a better grip on this familiar passage we need to consider the historical context: recall the story is actually told twice in Genesis 1 and 2, two descriptions of creation from different perspectives.

Scholars tell us the first account was written by a school of Jewish theologians called Yahinists. They wrote/”remembered” the story during a time when Israel was at its high point in its collective history. God created and gave humans an exalted role/place . . . created in God’s own image to care for the garden . . . but quickly reminds them that without due humility, they will fall . . . and they/we do. You came from dust (even if stardust) and to dust you shall return. It’s a cautionary tale for when we think we have it all together, we subtly think we are in essence gods.

The other source for the creation story is a group called the Priests who in contrast wrote during the Babylonian exile when Israel was at a low point – temple destroyed, people defeated and deported. Where does one look when everything is in an absolute state of disorder? For a source of light when there is darkness; for a source of order when

everything is out of control, chaotic? Answer: to the One who brought order out of the deep, the chaos. “This is a story of creation for our weak days when we are tempted to despair.”¹

In both accounts there are truths emphasized that are key to understanding something of God and ourselves. Some are obvious, but instead of filing away as elementary materials mastered, they need to be kept in focus before us.

Truth #1 God created . . . There are at least 10 theories using the language of cosmologists, physicists and philosophers to explain creation without referring to God. I do not care to become embroiled in a controversy that sets up false dilemmas. Without defending the biblical account, nor attacking human scientific efforts to understand the mechanics of creation, when the curtain rose – God. When the curtain sets – God. Without that reference point there is moral/ethical confusion, chaos, disorder and a loss of dignity, even our humanity.

2. The Creator of creation is de facto the owner. We belong. And later we learn humans

are charged with the care of creation responsible to that owner.

3. The Creator created by the Word i.e. “God said ‘Let there be . . .’” and there was. An idea in the mind of God becomes a reality when it is articulated, spoken. It underscores the power of the spoken word and what is a word but breath shaped, articulated . . . breath, an image of God. For us anything we create is first an idea, then articulated and realized.

4. The first building blocks are used as the basis for further creation: light, water in measured amounts. There is structure and rhythm . . . ebbs and flows, day and night, morning and evening. Life needs rhythm, progression. Everything happening at once is chaos and perhaps a description of our stressed, hurried lifestyle.

Have you noted at this point that Word and Light are images and designations for Jesus Christ? Even water takes on spiritual significance in baptism.

Finally, and importantly by the third day, God steps back from his days (24 hr. day?) work and saw that it was good. The conclusion on the

¹ Feasting on the Word, Yr. B, Vol 1, p. 221

6th days was, “God saw all that God had made and behold it was very good.”

Of course things went south with Sin entering the picture in the 3rd chapter of Genesis and threatening to undo the good. Some theologians have said the first two chapters of Genesis should be called The First Testament, the rest of what we call the Old Testament is the 2nd Testament, an account of the Fall and God’s reaching to humanity through the law and prophets and finally the New or Last Testament – the story of God’s incarnational act in Jesus to redeem humankind.

Well, that was then and this is now. But are there not dark times when such an account can remind us there is order; there is light? Are there not times when human pride and arrogance (in others and even ourselves) when we need to be reminded there is a God and we’re not Her/Him. Put in our place so to speak? “A close friend of President Franklin Roosevelt once visited him at the White House. After dinner, the two men talked well into the night about affairs of state and other weighty and important matters. When their conversation had wound down, FDR suggested they step into the Rose Garden to look at the stars. It was a beautiful, clear night, and the two stood in

silence, taking in the wonder of God’s creation. Then Roosevelt turned to his friend and said, ‘All right, I think we feel small enough now to go in and go to sleep.’”²

Are there not times when words are so many, so rancorous, that we need to know there is a Word from on high, a Word that is personal, truthful, humane and clear, a Word become flesh who dwelt/dwells among us full of grace and truth? Genesis 1 begins with such a Word, a creative Word. John in his prologue uses the image – In the beginning, was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He/Jesus was, is and shall be. And at the end Revelation describes an existence where there is no darkness, no need for the sun; the dark waters become a river that flows from the throne of God; there is no church for we are always in His presence . . . The creation is re-created. The last Word as well as the first is God’s.

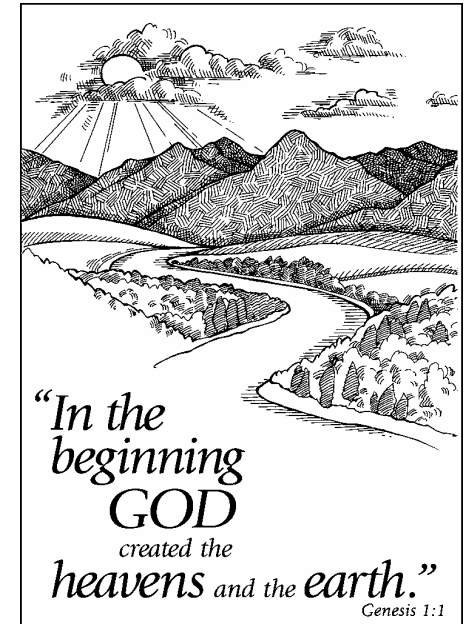
It’s not just there and then. It’s here and now. There is in all this magisterial creation something secure that adds balanced dignity to us. We are with all due humility, not gods but God’s crowning work. There’s no universe without u. “We are presented as God’s crowning work of art.

² Homiletics, Vol. 23, No. 6, p.67

The universe in its immensity, with its spiral galaxies and nebulae, finds a small but final fulfillment in us. From ancient times until now, around campfires and through telescopes, humans have marveled at the vastness of creation. A typical example comes at the end of act 1 in Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*, as Rebecca Gibbs mentions a letter that a friend got from her minister, addressed to ‘Jane Crofut; the Crofut Farm; Grover’s Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God.’ Genesis offers a radically different perspective, one that looks in the opposite direction – essentially, from the Mind of God down to Grover’s Corners.”³

We matter . . . not too small to be significant . . . not too big to be independent gods . . . created and loved by God.

³ Feasting on the Word, Yr. B, Vol 1, pgs. 219, 221



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