

SERMON TITLE- "And God Created . . . "

TEXT- Genesis 1

PREACHED AT- Neighbourhood Church

DATE- Sept. 14, 2008

This summer I took a quick bike ride during our time in Vernon and found myself on a ferry crossing Arrow Lake. This was a biker's road and on the ferry I was in the middle of a group of middle-aged, Harley riders who obviously knew each other. Soon a conversation was taking place across me.

They were discussing a book by Deepak Chopra called, The Third Jesus.

"I started thinking about Christianity after my wife died" said the one.

"But where would I go? I wasn't going to take it from some preacher."

Ecclesiastes 3:7 says there is "**a time to be silent and a time to speak**" and I was quite sure that this was the former "time." As so the preacher sat there incognito, and listened. Good practice for a preacher.

And what preacher was he thinking about? I wondered. Rev Lovejoy of the Simpsons? Billy Graham? Rick Warren or Bill Hybels? Rob Bell or Ernest Angley?

I'm not responsible for what some preacher says- I am responsible to accurately "preach the word." And I rode off the ferry with a renewed determination.

In my ears I heard the verses in Rom 10-

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? Romans 10:14

No matter what people think about preaching- the job of the preacher is to help people "hear." That is my job.

In a strange way that conversation led to this fall's sermon series. It is hard to figure out the deep questions of life. We don't generally think about them when we are going about our daily lives- but from time to time something happens and we start to wonder- what is the meaning of life?

That leads to the next question- so where and to whom do I go for answers?

This man decided to read Deepak Chopra because he found this book was on his wife's table after she passed away. He told his friend that he didn't even know if his wife had read the book or agreed with what it contained. There it was. He read it. Something in it made sense and now he listened to Deepak Chopra as he rode through the Kootneys with his friends.

No matter how you look at it- that is a search for truth that is very random. And as I thought about him 3 things occurred to me-

#1- Looking for truth when a crisis hits has some problems of its own. We are open to "truth" in that moment- but our discernment skills are compromised.

#2- "Truth" is difficult to capture in simple statements. We like to have sayings that capture "truth" for us but even when they do- they do so because they

are placed in a context. It is actually the context that brings those statements to light.

#3. We need context if we want search for truth. The right context makes for accurate understanding of something we see or hear- and the wrong context can distort how we understand what we see and hear in terrible ways.

We have all experienced overhearing a fragment of a conversation and coming to completely the wrong conclusion. The same thing can happen with our perceptions of what we see.

As people searching for "truth" then- we need to do our search before the crisis hits. It need to be careful and removed from panicky urgency. We need to take time to understand the "context" if we want to understand nuggets of "truth."

What a great candidate for a Fall Sermon Series!

With that in mind, it occurred to me that we should do a series of sermons on the book of the Bible- that more than any other- sets the context for truth- the Book of Genesis.

Many years ago when I was in seminary, I was given some very good advice by a prof. We had to read mountains of books and he told us- "Make sure you read a book's introduction most carefully. In almost every case it lays the foundation for everything that follows."

This insight is absolutely the case when it comes to the book of Genesis- it lays the foundation- not just for one sentence insights- but for the context in which the truth of the Bible is laid out. Understanding Genesis allows us to understand things.

And so it is that we are going to go through this book in the weeks ahead- working through it from beginning to end.

Genesis begins-

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 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. Genesis 1:1-2

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. Genesis 1:3-5

And God said, "Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. God called the expanse "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day. Genesis 1:6-8

And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day. Genesis 1:9-13

And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day. Genesis 1:14-19

And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day. Genesis 1:20-23

And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. Genesis 1:24-25

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. Genesis 1:31

If you were following carefully you will have noticed I skipped the part about the creation of people. Don't worry, we have enough to deal with today and next week we will cover that.

What Do We Learn?

#1. God Created Everything

This challenged the ancient worldview in a big way. There are all kinds of creation stories from that time out there. The magic of the Internet gives you

very quick access to them. For those want to do actual research you can bypass all the people who make grand claims and read them yourself.

If you do what you will find is some very complicated stories very often involving some kind of a battle and out of this battle- the world as we know it emerged.

The Bible creation story stands as a contrast to these and its simplicity is overwhelming. You will hear all kinds of writers who tell you that these myths are just like the Biblical story- [specifically the Gilgamesh Epic which dates from the time of Abraham] but read them for yourself and I think you will agree that the Biblical creation account is quite different.

From time to time I have creation arguments with people and my position is very easy to articulate- **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."**

That's it- no more- no less.

So how did that challenge the ancient worldviews? There were and are of course 100s and possibly 1000s of different Creation stories and each sets a very specific context from which to view life. These stories are very important.

Today we do not have the time to even scratch the surface of the different stories.

But the Bible has a very specific challenge to each one. The world was not created as a contest between gods and the Egyptians thought. This means that sacrificing to the gods to ensure a good harvest is not what God's people are to do.

This is an ancient worldview- but as we will discover later it is still alive.

God created the world as a divine act.

What does the simple creation account say to us today? Our prevailing myth is that we are the product of an amazing series of accidents. If the people of ancient Egypt and Babylon needed to hear that the reason for the Nile and the Euphrates rising and falling was not because of the anger of the gods at the sources of these great rivers- and that appeasing these gods was not the key to prosperity- the message to our time is quite different.

It is nonetheless the book of Genesis that gives us the Biblical response. It is simple- neither we, nor all of creation are an accident. We are the result of a deliberate, conscious act by God.

Among Christians there are different opinions about the meaning of the description of those acts of creation. Some Christians believe that the days are 24hour days, such as we experience- others do not.

If you have a strong opinion about this- that is fine- but be assured equally intelligent and sincere Christians will disagree. What unites us, however is a radical declaration that God- not an accident brought us and in fact the entire cosmos into existence.

Why does this matter? When we face a crisis- we may not understand what is going on- in fact doubtless we will not understand- but when we in despair look into the dark heavens and cry out- we are assured that life is not merely a series of unfortunate circumstances. This won't answer the terrible questions we have- but it will give a context for a comfort that God does offer His people.

But there is more in the simple story-

#2. Creation Is Very Good

We should stand in awe of creation. This is God's handiwork.

We should be careful how we treat it. There is a prevailing view that Christianity and the Biblical story are responsible pollution etc. The argument is that later on in the story humanity is instructed to-

Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Genesis 1:28

The argument is that this instruction has led to the misuse of the environment.

The argument is faulty on several fronts-

1. It takes this latter instruction completely out of its context. There is no inference from it- seen in context that if God passes on a beautiful creation to us that "subduing" it means turning it into a wasteland.

2. Christians aren't more destructive of the environment than other cultures.

Nobody who has actually traveled in other cultures can make that claim.

Christians, I believe should be more careful with their environment- they may not always be so- but I have yet to see a culture that doesn't create unsightly messes.

God created a beautiful cosmos. We are to be in awe of this creation and we know why.

I remember an article I read several years ago- written by a scientist talking about the fact that creation is simply a product of random chance.

The scientist spoke of walking down a beach and looking at the beauty around her and was contemplating its awesome complexity when a moment of exhilaration overwhelmed her. In her description this moment had all the power of a mystical vision and like a powerful vision it shook her to the core. In fact she described it as a spiritual experience- but without God. Atheists can be "spiritual" too was her conclusion.

The explanation seemed hollow to say the least and in my view she knew it even as she tried to explain it.

But those of us who believe that God created everything have a context for the awe that creation inspires- just as we understand why people would stand before the works of a great artist.

The idea that creation is the object of awe is part of being human but Genesis 1 adds an important fact to this observation,

#3. Creation Itself Is Not Divine

Genesis 1 also declares a profound principle that humanity has struggled with from the earliest times until today. From the beginning thoughtful people have looked at the world around them with a sense of awe. Creation is God's creation and awe inspiring at every level but creation itself is NOT to be the object of worship.

Genesis 1 makes a profound separation between God and creation. From the very beginning God instructed people that they are to worship- nothing but God the Creator.

Why? because from the beginning that sense of awe has shifted to worship.

The elevation of any part of creation to any level of divine is absolutely forbidden. Creation is creation and God is God.

In ancient times the challenge was idol worship- this consisted in the building of images that were to represent God and in some cases even be gods.

The prophets that condemned this practice in the strongest language.

Wood is wood. Stone is stone. Metal is metal. Nothing more nothing less.

Taking a piece of stone, metal or wood and performing an elaborate ceremony over it does not make that piece of material anything more than it began as when it was taken from its original location.

We easily think of idol worship as an ancient practice but it is as alive today as it ever was- its form may have changed slightly but the essence has not.

And what is its most recognizable form? It is materialism- the pursuit of every aspect of creation.

In the NT the challenge against idolatry had already changed. Already actual stone or metal idols were not the real problem. The real challenge was nailed John's letters. He writes-

Do not love the world nor the things in the world . . . For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 1 John 2:15-16

And there in language as powerful as can be constructed the problem is spelled out. Don't fall in love with creation.

It shouldn't take too much thinking to recognize the problem within ourselves. We get caught up with pursuing "stuff" of all kinds.

This is as natural as breathing and so from the beginning of the Bible to its last chapter the challenge goes out- remember that God is God and He alone is worthy of our worship.

But the fact that it is natural doesn't make it right and when we really understand the context that Gen 1 sets out for us we are able to understand why we might be drawn to worship creation- it is beautiful.

But we also can easily see why worshiping the Creator rather than the creation is the right thing. We also then understand why worship the creation is such an affront to the Creator.

The modern problem of materialism is easy to see and even easier to criticize. Every one from movie stars to professors finds an easy pulpit when we look at the way humans chase after things.

But as those who understand the context that Gen 1 gives us understand why.

Creation is God's creation.

Creation is very good.

BUT God is the Creator and He alone must be the object of worship.

Understanding that is a very powerful context.