

LENT WEEK 1

March 1, 2020

READING

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.

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.

And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

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.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault 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 vault 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.

And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, 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.

And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the 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.

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

REFLECTION

As I read through the creation account in Genesis, I find myself enjoying the methodical way in which the writer of Genesis paints for us a picture of each sequence of events, taking us from nothingness to fullness. In my mind's eye, I see the majesty of the Rockies, the beauty and vastness of the oceans, the awesomeness of the night sky on a warm summer evening, the animals, strange and interesting, that have their habitat here alongside us on this beautiful earth. And the words repeat: "And it was so", "And God saw that it was good".

But I also find myself asking this question: why? I'm certain it was not a result of loneliness for God was surely not alone as he said, "Let us make...". In that strange triune existence, he was, before the creation of this earth, God the father, God the son, and God the spirit. He remains the same today. But in the fullness of that reality, why bother with us and the creation of the universe, especially given that God knew how off the rails this story would go.

I'm inclined to think the answer lies in the character of God. Artists are compelled to create. Their art is, for them, like breathing. It is necessary, life giving, life affirming. While much thought goes into each piece of art, I think the act of doing the art is simply the first and most natural response an artist can have. It is when they are doing art that they feel most alive. I believe this to be true of God too.

The formation of this world is a reflection of his vast mind, immense creativity, his love of beauty, his sense of humour, and his deep satisfaction in fulfilling his inherent love of creating. For me, this is reinforced by the lack of adjectives in that first chapter of Genesis. "And God saw it was good". Humans don't rave about our ability to breathe or see or touch. We just do. We tend to marvel over the things that take us by surprise. Not "God flipped out in delight when he lit up the Milky Way" or "God marvelled at the formation of the Everest, rising above the rest of earth in profound majesty". Simply put, "it was good".

And just as a piece of art tells us about the artist that created it, the beauty of this world gives us glimpses of its untainted perfection, telling us about the goodness of God himself. In the midst of that, he created us, humankind, in his own image. Why? Because by creating us in his likeness, he now has the opportunity to commune with his own creation, to interact with us, to fellowship with us. He delights in all of creation, but we alone are meant to be in relationship with him, have our being in him, making us complete in knowing him and being known by him.

That knowledge should astound us. Take the most remarkable thing you have ever laid eyes on and think about the immense pleasure and humility you experienced in that moment. That is a tiny picture of what God experienced when he created each one of us. Everything else is surely beautiful and magnificent, awe-inspiring even. But the incredible difference between us and the majesty of the created world around us, is that he wants to interact with us, in real time and space. We are not inanimate objects that exist for the joy of being created. We are meant to walk with God, talk with him, have our being in him. Surely, this is where we experience our greatest joy. But what stops me in my tracks, is knowing that this is actually where God experiences his greatest pleasure as well. You, dear friend, are the apple of his eye. As such, be reassured that he loves you more than you can ever grasp.

REMINDER

To understand with fresh eyes, the significance of Christ's death, it's important to be reminded that God's sole purpose in creating us was for us to dwell in the reality of that our lives are not an accident or inconsequential. We are God's greatest joy, fully known and fully loved exactly as we are. As you journey through this week, remind yourself of this throughout each day. May it transform you and set you free to walk unabashedly with Him into whatever circumstances you find yourself in.

PRAYER

God, paint for each one of us this week, a picture of how you see us. We recognize our brokenness. We get completely stuck in our own foolishness. We chastise ourselves for our many mistakes. We wonder how anyone can love us. And yet you do. You love us with an everlasting love, you sing over us with song, you watch over our coming and our going. You care intimately about each of us. Above all else, you created us for you. Help us to see how incredible that truly else.