

Sermon for October 3, 2021

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In Genesis 1, we find one account of creation.

We read “In the beginning when God created the heavens and earth...” and hear a beautiful unfolding of all of creation. Throughout the text we hear the repeated phrase. “And God saw that it was good.”

Darkness and light: Good.

Skies, lands, and seas: Good.

The earth and all that fills it—plants and rocks, finned, feathered, and fur: Good.

Humankind in God’s image: Very good.

The first creation story ends “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

Chapter 2 of Genesis shares a different account of creation. Things happen in a different order. In this account, prior to the creation of plants and animals, God forms man out of the dust of the earth. God then plants a garden and places the man in the garden alone. And right there in contrast to the overwhelming goodness we read in Chapter 1, this section of scripture reads “The Lord God said, “It is NOT good...”

It comes as a surprise. Not good? What in creation is not good? God says “It is not good that the man should be alone.” Being alone is not good and immediately God creates relationship and community.

Out of the ground God forms every animal and bird and brings them to the human to name. Naming is an act of relationship, community building. God ends loneliness by giving creation to one another to abide together. Then God continues. The human though no longer alone surrounded by animals of the field and birds of the air, needs a partner, a helper. The Hebrew noun is traditionally translated in English as “helpmeet” and interestingly is the same noun used other places in scripture for God.

Consider that in Genesis 1 verse 26 God says “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.” We confess our faith in the Triune – God always throughout all time three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is in Godself communal relationship. God looks at the human and declares “It is not good that you should be alone” and God acts to create humankind in the image of the communal, relational God. God takes a rib from one and makes another, bone from bone, flesh from flesh.

“It is not good that human should be alone.” God creates for relationship and community.

According to the book “Real Connections,” 40% of adults in America report regularly feeling lonely. A quarter of all households in the US are someone living alone. One in four people say they have nobody they can talk to about life struggles. The pandemic has only increased this feeling of isolation and “alone”ness. Authors Joy and Heidi write “Churches play a major role in addressing what has been called an epidemic of social isolation.” We are after all created for relationship, made in the image of our Triune, relational God for community with one another

and all of creation. God is always at work bringing about God's goodness through developing relationships and drawing creation into community. We as the church are called into this work.

As the church we not only to combat loneliness but seek to draw all people and creation into full community. In our readings today we see two scriptural examples of the drawing in of all people.

In today's Gospel reading, the religious leaders get into a discussion with Jesus about the importance of relationships. They ask – when if ever is it lawful for man to divorce his wife? They know the law of Moses, man can write a certificate of dismissal and divorce his wife.

Jesus responds "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you." He then tells his disciples that "whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery *and if she* divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

There is more happening in this conversation than we may understand as present day readers. Jesus would have shocked those listening. He has not only said that the man who divorces his wife commits adultery, he has continued on to say "*if she* divorces her husband." Jesus has given the woman status, equal power and responsibility in the relationship. In this time women were less partner and more property in a marriage. If a husband wrote a certificate of dismissal it left a woman without property, income, voice. She had no say or course of action. Jesus brings women into the fullness of relationship and community. Jesus returns to the Genesis image "I will make a helper, a partner," humankind made in the image of God, our Triune God – one in three persons -Father, Son and Holy Spirit, co-equal.

At the same time, people are bringing little children to touch Jesus and the disciples are stopping them. Jesus lashes out at them, "Let the little children come to me and do not stop them..." Again a surprise. Jesus is inviting the children, the powerless, into full relationship and community. He takes them into his arms, lays his hands on them, and blesses them.

It is not good for anyone to be alone, or less than; all are drawn into the fullness of community. Where do we need to be at work today, ensuring no one is alone or less than, that all are drawn into the fullness of community?

In our Psalm today we read that human beings have been made "little less than divine" to "rule over the works of God's hands." "Little less than divine" echoing the Genesis text "made in the image of God." Too often we have claimed our "little less than divine" status as superiority and defined our "ruling" as dominance over and above other creation, even other human beings. But consider our Hebrews reading today. Jesus, given all rule and authority, humbled himself to the point of death to draw all people into relationship and community with God and all creation. The divine laid down his divinity to dwell amidst those he was charged to "rule." Made in this image of God, this is our model for relationship and community with all creation. We humble ourselves, laying down our self-centeredness, to draw all people into relationship and community with God and all creation. For God said "It is not good that anyone should be alone."

The Good News: God from the very onset of creation recognized that it was not good that anyone should be alone and has acted throughout all time to draw all creation into community.

God in Christ has secured your never being alone. For in Christ you and all creation have been reconciled and brought back into relationship with God and all creation. "Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Created in the image of our God, by the power of the Holy Spirit we strive to live as partners, helpers, valuing relationship with all creation.

Today is World Communion Sunday and we remember children of God around the world gathered together as community in Christ. I end today with a poem for World Communion Sunday written by Jan Richardson.

AND THE TABLE WILL BE WIDE by Jan Richardson

And the table
will be wide.

And the welcome
will be wide.

And the arms
will open wide
to gather us in.

And our hearts
will open wide
to receive.

And we will come
as children who trust
there is enough.

And we will come
unhindered and free.

And our aching
will be met
with bread.

And our sorrow
will be met
with wine.

And we will open our hands
to the feast
without shame.

And we will turn
toward each other
without fear.

And we will give up
our appetite
for despair.

And we will taste
and know
of delight.

And we will become bread

for a hungry world.
And we will become drink
for those who thirst.
And the blessed
will become the blessing.
And everywhere
will be the feast.

And God saw that it was good!
Amen.