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Sermon

7.11.21

Creation – What did you say?

Let us pray: may the words and ideas shared this morning be pleasing to you Holy God, and may they draw each of us closer to you! Amen

Creation – God’s gift to us. I read an interesting description about creation written by Father Richard Rohr – he is a Franciscan friar and one of the most popular spirituality authors and speakers in the world today. He says – and I quote “Perhaps the most important thing to bear in mind when reading the first chapters of Genesis is that it is written **not** about the past but about the present.” Unquote. Think about that for a second – the creation story is not about the past but about the present. He goes on to say: Quote! “It is about the perennial present, the present that is always with us. It is **not** a book of history or a scientific account of creation. It is not an eyewitness report of how the world and the human race began. Rather, it is a mythological portrayal of **the relationship** between the **Creator and the creation.**” Unquote.

Think about the story that Marjory and Sonia just shared with us. Step by step, gift by gift; God created everything....everything and told humanity the following: quote: “***I make you trustees of My estate, so care for My creation and rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that roams across the earth.***” unquote

For the next few weeks, we are going to be exploring creation – God’s gift to us. Today we will explore some specific details about the foundation and authors of the creation stories!.....Yes, I said stories. Did you know that there are two different creation stories in the early chapters of Genesis? The first story is the one read today – Genesis chapter 1 through chapter 2 verse 3. The second story we will be talking about another day, is found in Genesis chapter 2 verses 4 through 25.

The ancient writers were not worried by the obvious differences between the two accounts. They differ in style, order, facts, details and date in which they were written. For those pulling together the Hebrew scriptures, both stories reveal the same inspired truth: that God alone is the Creator, that everything is God’s creation, and that everything which God creates is good.

Let’s start with exploring the authors of the Torah – the Torah is the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures, also known as the first five books in the Old Testament. Traditionally these books were believed to be written by Moses – that he was the recipient of the original revelation from God. But scholars, beginning in the 18th century said that it wasn’t possible. Scholars say, the Torah could not have been written by a single person – because of differences in style, language and contradiction in the texts to name a few.

The precise identity of the authors will remain a mystery – barring an archaeological find of great importance. It has been widely accepted that there are 5 principal authors or groups of authors of the Torah. We also need to

remember that many of the stories came from the oral tradition and were passed down generation after generation. To give you a rough idea about the time span of the Torah: The age of the Patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was around 2000 – 1700 BCE (Before the Common Era); David’s reign was around 1005- 967 BCE, the fall of Judah and the destruction of the First Temple was around 587- 586. I tell you this to give you an idea of the time periods. Now I must say that the scholars have outdone themselves with the names given to each of the five authors or groups of authors that have been determined to be the authors. J, E, D, P and R. Really, that is what they named them. I’ll tell you why those names as we move forward.

There are two different authors of the creation stories which is why there are different stories. Each having a different emphasis. Today we will concentrate on them.

The first story that Marjory and Sonia read to us was written by the group known as “P” or the Priestly writer. P’s contribution was probably written between 550 and 500 BCE just after the destruction of the first temple. They were very concerned with the elaborate observances and duties of the ancient Jewish priesthood. Often dry and detail-obsessed, P was particularly interested in justifying all of the ritual laws developed by the early Jewish priesthood. I’m guessing at this but the “P” editing the creation story probably was placed first because the “P” editors could put it first – they were the last editors. (just a thought)

The second creation story was written much earlier – between 950 and 900 BCE and they were known as “J”. Jahwists. J consistently calls the Israelite God “Yahweh.” J is the best storyteller, more interesting, more humorous and more human than the others. J’s Yahweh interacts with humanity easily and directly. In the second creation story God creates earth and heaven first, then Adam “from the dust of the ground” and then the animals and birds to keep Adam company. But Adam is still lonely, so God, in relationship with Adam, creates woman out of one of Adam’s ribs. We will explore this story another day.

These basic differences in style and language are clear differences that when one pays attention, they can recognize which group is the author and when it was written. The book of Genesis spans a vast amount of time. From the beginning of time to around 1500 BCE. The authors did not know much about this long history, nor did they care. They were documenting a few highlights about human origins that had particular religious significance for Israel’s view of life and to record a few traditions about their ancestors to help the people to understand how they came to be a people and a nation. I hope you’re not sleeping yet with all this detail. But I think it’s important to explore, because for me it helps to open my eyes and recognize the wonder, mystery and amazing gift that this book – the Bible is to us. These 66 different books written throughout the ages still speaks to each of us today. Books and stories passed down over thousands of years, helping us to explore our relationship with God – the God of all creation.

The first creation story that Marjory and Sonia read this morning is more detailed and is the story we were most likely told in Sunday School. God first created the

“heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void”. Out of the void – God created everything.....and after each step – God said it was good! The Priestly writers – (remember they wrote their version after the “J” writers) expanded the theology of the “J” writers to have an emphasis on the goodness of God’ creation. The “P” writer focused on the moments of blessing and the goodness of God.

We each are different and come to this Holy Book differently – much like those who put it together. Like Richard Rohr said – “It is not a book of history or a scientific account of creation. It is **not** an eyewitness account of creation. Rather it is a mythological portrayal of the relationship between the Creator and the creation.

For God, it’s all about relationship – our relationships with God, with each other and with all of creation. Yes, they are different creation stories but with the same theme: – relationship and God alone is our Creator.

Having the stories come from different perspectives, with a different emphasis doesn’t make one story true and the other not true. If I were to tell you all a story about the day that I graduated from college – I guarantee you would hear four different stories – one from my mother, a different story from my father, still another story from my brother and still yet a different story from me. All four of us were there – and over the years all four of us developed and remembered different moments and had different experiences. All of us would retell that moment with a different focus.

How do we express our experiences with God? What words do we use? What images are in each of our heads?

If we think about this in theological terms, the creation stories are saying that everything is a gift, everything is grace, everything comes from God. God is the One who makes something out of nothing and gives it to us, not way back when, but here and now. God makes us what we are; a gift from God, to each other, to our community and to the world. God created us to be in relationship with God – sharing God's love with every part of creation.

May it be so.

Amen