

15 SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST - SEPTEMBER 10 GOD CREATES HUMANS

To the surprise of absolutely no one, we broken humans can misuse Scripture to benefit ourselves and as a weapon against others. We find ways to choose the verses and interpretations that say what we want to say and claim it's God speaking.

One of the common ways that people have misused the story in Genesis 2 is in the mistreatment of women. Another way that this story has been used to exclude and harm people is as a proof text condemning queer people, especially those outside of the gender binary. The gender binary is a concept that states that there are only two genders - male and female - and usually also goes along with a condemnation of transgender people.

The creation story is about God's original intent for humanity. The creation story in Genesis 1 is the one most people are familiar with. Metaphorically, God creates the world in six days, including humans, and rests on the seventh day.

In Genesis 2, creation happens in a single day. Many people are not aware that there are two very different creation stories. The details of the two stories have often been blended into one. In the Genesis 2 story, which is our focus today, the creation order is different from the story in Genesis 1. We find the earth is a dry desert-like place, there are no trees yet, but it is some sort of garden. Out of the dust, God creates adam, or human being, a dust person. So what does it mean to be human?

Contrary to popular belief, it makes zero logical sense that adam would be a fully functional man, as we know it, with genitals and everything.

Yet, we have a God who is a spirit, ungendered. We have a human, a person who has been imbued with characteristics of creativity and care-taking, one who has consciousness, and is to be responsible to create and tend just like God would. Gender is not an issue or factor here. It just doesn't make sense.

This is God's story of relationships. So we have a singular person imbued with the beautiful qualities of God; yet immature, fresh, naive qualities. But adam is lonely. So God creates the animals. God's intention for humanity (adamah), for humans' calling, is to be stewards, responsible creative caretakers, and to take on the role of relationships.

The adam does not find an equality in the animals that God has created. So God puts the adam, the human, to sleep. Many translations have used the English word "rib" which doesn't adequately depict what was taken from adam. The Hebrew word used is "zela" which often means "a component, or more often, a side-wall" (alternately, a chamber), indicating that more than simply a rib was taken.

Many scholars believe that the entire female essence was removed from man and fashioned into a woman. This would mean that the "man" in Genesis 1, could have been an undifferentiated or androgynous person, with the blessing of male and female being a declaration in anticipation of the separation of the genders in Genesis 2.

The woman was then brought to the man who said, "This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man." The Hebrew words used for woman and man here are "ishshah" and "isah," respectively. This is the first time that a specifically male reference is made, and it happens at the time of

creation or extraction of woman. Up to this point, the more generic “adam” was used. Instead of pointing out their differences, the man was actually pointing out the similarities. They were both two of the same kind, and suitable for each other. Man was identifying woman as “of himself”.

One of the last verses of our reading says, “This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.” Bible scholars note that “united into one” is actually in the past tense, and to expand the verse, they add the words, “as they once were” or “as they once were at the beginning of creation”.

Now when God puts the adam to sleep, God now creates something completely new. God creates two people, who are meant to be complimentary, meant to be collaborative, meant to be partners, a God-made helper. In Hebrew, the word helper is used for Eve which means life. “Helper” is used almost exclusively to refer to God in the Old Testament. God is the helper of people. In the New Testament Jesus refers to the coming Holy Spirit as a helper to his disciples and believers.

There is no subservient role in this story. It makes no sense when adam did not find equality in the animals, that God would create another human being with the intention of making that person less than adam, in any way; intellectually, spiritually, or anything. These two people were created people with differences.

There is something beautiful about the differences. God decided not to go with some sort of a sexual route. Rather, God said they were created for companionship, for the sake of this person knowing who they are, for the sake or living happily in this world. There needs to be a difference,

there needs to be diversity, there needs to be uniqueness. This is not a statement about sexuality or gender. It is about the diversity of humanity.

God placed together two people who were different from each other, so they could grow and learn together, challenge each other, collaborate, work together, and both of them representing and bearing the image of God. The goal that God has for relationships is complimentary, collaborative, compassionate, honouring and equal. It is not about the fact that God made them male and female and they have to remain that way, and that's the way it works or has to be.

God made diverse and complementary relationships. We can see that in friendships, we can see that in colleagues, we can see that in so many relationships, besides simply a romantic partner. Often we are drawn and learn from the best, those who have unique personalities and gifts that are different from our own.

Eternally powerful, God's intention for humanity was to create a diverse humanity; to see in the others something that is not in ourselves, not just physically, not about genitals, but in the spirit, the emotion, and how the differences are perceived in the world. The sad part is that when we see what has actually happened is how the differences are perceived in the world; in the way our bodies look, in our genders, in our abilities. Instead of learning from and honouring the difference, we ended up stratifying them, turning them into a hierarchy of worth, dignity, and import, that has been crushing for humanity, crushing for the earth. In this story, adam did not say: "Hey, these animals are less then me, I get to do with them whatever I want." No it wasn't about that at all.

We know, we are aware, of the problems of the earth; are frustrated by

them, even feeling hopeless at times. It is imperative that we talk to people, that we remind them of God's intention for humanity. God intended that we as adamah (human beings) have these beautiful God-like qualities of creativity, in helping, in partnership, in care-taking. Our relations are meant to be complimentary, loving, and kind. The differences we see in each other are to be celebrated. But we are not there yet. We can work to return there, not back to the Garden of Eden, not back to some sort of childhood innocence where we don't know what we don't know. Rather, with maturity, with wisdom, we can look back on how this has not worked: the hierarchy, the misogyny, the racism, the colonialism. It simply hasn't worked.

Trying to force people into boxes, trying to insist that men are supposed to be dominant over women and having to virtually beat people into submission clearly cannot be the will of God. The harm done physically, psychologically, spiritually, or sexually, is outside the will of God.

How do we go to a new place together? How do we say: "this was God's intention, this is what has happened." How do we move forward without waiting for some heavenly afterlife, but to say "How can we participate in bringing God's intention here on earth?"

We need more meaningful conversations; we need to dream and to envision what could be; we need to take our knowledge and understanding of the world now, not what it was 2,000, 6,000 or 10,000 years ago, but now. How do we embody something new and good where all people can thrive, and our differences are celebrated and we return back to a spirit of collaboration and partnership, care-taking, and helping?

Is this enough to dream about together, to wonder, to listen, to listen to each other, to listen to our dreams and ideas and not be cynical about what the future could be? Rather, we need to wonder if our imagination is truly ignited by the Holy Spirit. If we let dreams come slowly, come to manifestation: one person, one relationship, one congregation, one community at a time, beautiful things can and will happen. As we ponder the beginning of this trajectory, we become aware of how humanity went astray as we move to a better place for all humanity to thrive together.

Genesis is a beautiful treasure trove of gender equality! God in all of God's glory deemed humans worthy to carry God's image. God created us in God's divine image. When joined together in unity, we can with all our differences, offer a completed picture of the image of God to the world, and what a beautiful picture that is!

Amen.

THE PRAYERS of the People Pentecost 15 September 10, 2023

Go down Moses, way down in Egypt land. Tell all Pharaohs to “let my people go”. Oh God, and God of every suffering refugee, we join in prayer to ask for the wisdom and courage to name the pharaohs that make life intolerable for so many people in the world.

When Israel was in Egypt and oppressed so hard they could not stand, you sent Moses to thunder: “Let my people go.” In the same manner we pray you send us to condemn the intolerable, to demand that those who enjoy the titles and perks of leadership stop cynically trying to find narrow advantage in manipulating suffering. We ask that rich nations use their wealth wisely both to mitigate the problems that create refugees and to provide safe destinations at the end of their fearful journeys.

God, we recognize that: for lack of safety; for lack of opportunity; for lack of basic life essentials; for lack of food; for lack of water; for lack of political representation; for lack of leadership without corruption; the impact is that millions of people, including children and the elderly, are driven to abandon the homes they’ve known. They are driven to risk their own lives. They are even driven to risk the lives of their children to seek safety and hope for a better life.

As we turn our hearts and minds to extreme weather, we pray for southern Brazil, where a cyclone and its aftermath has left at least 27 dead, and thousands forced from their homes; and to Bulgaria, Turkey, and Greece, as deadly flooding has left at least 10 dead. May you reach out your hands through the helping hands of those who aid all who have been impacted by flooding. We pray also for the people of Morocco where the effects of a strong earthquake has left more than 2000 dead, many without homes to return to impassable roads and a shortage of water and food.

And, as we turn our hearts and minds to conflict, let us pray for Ukraine, where at least 17 have been killed in a missile attack on a market in Kostyantynivka, and many others have been wounded. May

your strong arms of justice bring about the kind of change that leads to peace and teaches us to use our arms for your peace rather than injury.

We pray to you Almighty God, in this prolonged time of raging wildfires. You are our refuge and our strength, a very present help in time of trouble. Do not let us fail in the face of these events. Uphold us with your love and give us the strength we need. Help us in our confusion and guide our actions. Heal the hurt, console the bereaved and afflicted, protect the innocent and helpless, and deliver any who are still in peril.

O God who holds each one of us, we lift our hearts in prayer for the students around the globe who have just started a new school year. Help students, educators, and grown ups who raise children navigate the busier season and the additional stress that may bring. We realize that this time of year brings additional tasks for most of us, and that the sudden change of pace can cause stress and anxiety. With all the changes and challenges we face, we often think ‘how can I possibly manage this?’ In these times, remind us that you are there holding our burdens alongside us.

We are grateful for the countries around the globe that provide free school lunches for students, especially as the number of undernourished people has grown over the past several years. Help us to address the underlying causes of world hunger. As we recognize that the world has just experienced the hottest summer ever recorded, may we see the ways extreme weather impacts hunger. May we see how climate change impacts the Middle East and Africa at a disproportionately high rate. May we see how conflict, economic disparities, and racial inequalities also impact hunger. We pray that you wrap your loving arms around those who do not have enough nutrition, and around those who govern, that together we might make change through your love.

As the days get darker and colder for some of us, or as the days get lighter and warmer for others, may we find moments to be still and

feel your presence in all of creation. May we find moments of joy in the re-gathering with friends and communities we missed over the time apart, knowing that in the outstretched arms of those we care about, you are there wrapping us in your loving arms.

We pray for our Bishops, Susan and Kathy, pastors, deacons, and lay leaders. We pray for those being installed or ordained. We pray for the congregations of Faith Lutheran, Powell River – and their pastor, Rev. Paula Sampson and Our Saviour's Lutheran, Prince George – and their pastor, Rev. Fleming Blishen. We pray for all those gathering this week for the 13th assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Warsaw, Poland.

We ask that you watch over those who are suffering physically, mentally, emotionally or socially; those who are homebound or lonely; those who are living with substance abuse and are fighting their addictions, and/or undergoing treatments. We pray for those awaiting surgery and those who are in the process of recovery and healing.

We pray for our own congregation, that you guide us as we discern together the future you are preparing for us, and dream of a world where wellness, wholeness, and harmony are enjoyed by all you have created. Help us to remember the dreams you had when you created adamah.

O God who holds each one of us, help us to feel your presence – a presence that brings more moments of hope, more moments of joy, and a life-changing understanding of what love is. We pray all these things, and whatever else is on our hearts, in Jesus' name we pray.

Amen

God in Community, make us all one Body, as we pray the prayer you taught us....

Our Father ...