



# LESSONS IN LIVING

## *What We Can Learn from the Creation Myth in Genesis*

### *“Part 2 - Adam: We are Born of the Earth”*

A St. Andrew's Sermon  
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby  
January 11, 2026

#### **Scripture Reading:** Genesis 2:4-7 (*New International Version*)

*This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when God made the earth and the heavens. Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*

#### Sermon

It's funny when I ask people now how they're doing; there's always an asterisk. “*Besides the death of the Republic, I'm doing great.*” (Laughter)

It's such a hard time for everybody, I think. Since I've been in the ministry, I've never told anybody who to vote for. I don't intend to ever do that. At the same time, when you have a President that lies, you have an obligation to do fact-checking. So even if you vote for somebody who hates immigrants, it's your job to protect your human family. Even if you think the border situation is bad, when they put human beings on busses and parade them around, that's where a Christian comes in to stand up for their human family.

It's a very difficult time to remember what it is to be a human being. There's so many things that trigger us now. You see people who are so wounded that they just rejoice in making progressives unhappy. How sad is that? How sad is it to have pro-life people who celebrate the assassination of human beings as long as they're called leftists or narco-terrorists. What kind of pro-life is that?

We also have friends who've fallen into the exact opposite type of hate and are calling people names and humiliating people and doing this kind of thing. So, there's never been a more

important time for you and me to be human beings. As a reminder, this includes the rest of our species. See, whenever we think we're superior to the rest of our species, there's a problem. We need to stand up for other people as courageously as we need to. At the same time, hatred plays no role in healing this species.

One of the things I've always loved about the ancient religions of the world is they were attempts to understand what it means to be a human being in the cosmos. As I said last week, Genesis begins with two contradictory stories of creation. So right away, you realize this has to be understood poetically.

And as you look at the story, clearly the person who wrote it had never studied evolution. The rains are coming after the plants. Little technical errors there in the story. (*Laughter*). But since there are two contradictory stories, you realize these are two poems. Again, they're trying to tell traumatized people how to remember their own roots.

In philosophy, one of the dead-end conundrums is matter and mind. We know that both seem to exist in the world, but what is the relationship? How does mind evolve out of matter or vice versa? However you want to say that.

In some cultures, they say that only consciousness exists. That matter is an illusion. That's one way to solve that problem. Not very effective scientifically. Another approach is to say that consciousness is this illusion. Only matter exists. That also takes care of the problem, except if you look at your newborn infant and can't see anything that isn't on the periodic chart, you're probably not going to do a very good job of parenting. Then Christianity fell into European and Greek mindset, which is dualistic, where the body is bad, the spirit is good, and we're ghosts in a machine. That doesn't work either.

Today, we're going to look at a mythic understanding. One of the modern concepts that deals with the mind-body problem is that of emergent materialism. That covers the basis of the universe, things like energies and matter and space-time, that kind of thing, but human consciousness is a very special condition. And something happens in human consciousness that does not happen in the universe alone.

When we talk about truth, goodness, and beauty, those are human qualities, the qualities of human experience. And one of the most devastating things is when you think that truth exists independently in the world, or you think that evil exists independently in the world. You don't think to ask, "*Okay, this is bad for whom and in what way?*" Mythically, the story of the creation of Adam is much closer to the modern view of emergent materialism.

To follow the poem, you need to know three Hebrew words. You don't need to know them, but I need you to know them. (*Laughter*). "Adam" means "human." It became a male as opposed to a female, but I think that comes later in the mythological tradition. In the other story that they're co-equally created. Adam means human being, creature. "Adamah," the same word with an "ah" at the end, means "earth." "Dam" means "red" or "blood."

In Genesis, when you read the story of humanity coming from the earth, one human kills another, and their blood cries from the earth. In Hebrew, that was a beautiful poem that you'd never even think of taking literally. "Adam" comes from "Adamah, and then the shedding of this "dam." One way to understand this, the first part, is if instead of calling him "Adam," we call him "Clay," or "Sandy," or "Dusty." (*Laughter*). Now we're in the same game.

If we emerge from nature, then nature is not just our backdrop. Having a European mindset, you've probably thought of the natural world as something that's just the backdrop for the human experience. What this story is telling you is nature is not your *backdrop*; nature is your *essence*. Nature is your *source*. You weren't put on the earth. You've grown out of the earth. You're like a leaf on a tree.

What that tells you is your roots go down in the elemental aspects; earth, wind, fire, which is why those are sacraments all over the world. Because remembering our roots calms us enormously. I think about this all the time. Why does fire so relax us when we just sit there looking at fire? Why does the sound of wind in the trees make it easier to sleep? Why does gurgling water speak to us?

In the Western tradition, we believe that a ghost-like being named God made the material world. This story gives us maybe a more mature way to look at it, where we come out of the earth. There's a wonderful story in Buddhism where Buddha is going through his enlightenment, and the demons are there trying to gaslight him. They say, "*How dare you think you can cross over? By what authority do you make your teachings?*" And his response is to tap the earth.

As we look at political disaster, it's important to realize we're deeper than what's happening. Our roots go into the elemental. So even though this is a time that none of us would choose, we can still be peaceful, we can still be joyful, we can still be loving. We don't have to surrender and fall into the storm. It's okay if we get sad or tired and have to check out. But to realize that you are deeper. You have come from the core of the universe. So, what happens to you, while it's very important, is not essential to who you are.

So that's the first word, "Adamah," the soil, earth. The second is "red" or "blood." And imagine that Dusty or Clay was born in Oklahoma on the Red River. (*Laughter*). Because a lot of these stories come from rivers that have a lot of clay in them. The Nile was one of them. A lot of the rituals that we think of as Christian are actually celebrations of the Nile flooding and turning red.

In the story, after they're caught naked, they're embarrassed. The word "red" can also mean "blushing." Do you remember what they made their clothes with? Fig leaves. Now, in mythological language, that tells you that probably the fruit was not an apple. It was probably a fig. Much more economic in this story. If you've ever touched a fig leaf, as everybody in biblical days would have, you'd realize that it's very prickly.

So, the story of them making their clothes from fig leaves, the equivalent story today would be their making their clothes out of Brillo pads. (*Laughter*). They're uncomfortable. They're tingling. They're feeling humiliation. The stories are giving us an invitation to understand what it is to be human from the inside out. They don't know the answer from the outside in. They don't

have the scientific method. But they're very observant of the human experience. The reason blood gets lifted up, I think, is because life hurts. Loving hurts. And if you decide not to become cruel at this time in history, it will be a decision that you make, that you don't want the poison of hatred in your own heart. Now, that's a costly decision sometimes.

The cross has become almost a monstrous symbol in many theologies. But I think originally it was a rejection of empire and also a symbol of the pain that comes from loving. When someone has a child they're going to experience more joy and more exhaustion; more joy and more pain. It's okay if you all want to look at each other. That's okay. (*Laughter*). But that's what happens when love grows.

When I first started meditating, I had no political interest at all. But how do you grow in love without caring about the pain of the world? What kind of love shuts down in the face of pain? So, the greater our love grows, the more we have to deal with the political things, but also the deeper we need our roots to go so that we don't lose joy, peace, and the very love we're searching for. Pain in life is not a punishment. Pain in life is the price tag for being in the circle of life. Simply being in the web of life. You eat others for a while, and then you get eaten. That's the game.

When we celebrate Communion in a bit, I think that's what they were getting at. To say "yes" to all of life means to say "yes" to the pain. Not that you seek it out, not that you want it, not that you don't do everything you can to avoid it. But you can't go deeply into love without feeling the pain, suffering, and fear of others.

So, we have to get beyond the idea that enlightenment is happiness. There's a joy there, but the joy includes pain.

So that's two of the words, "Adamah," "dam." I have to be careful when I say that one. And then finally, "Adam." Again, don't think male. That's the way the story got unwrapped. But in these ancient myths, it wasn't about gender roles or politics. It was about the human condition. It's about saying "yes" to life in its completeness.

Have you ever heard the story of Prometheus, where he's tied to a rock and the bird is eating his flesh? "Prometheus" means "foresight." Once you wake up and realize you're going to die someday, and the people you love are going to die someday, you've been wounded. Only love can turn that wound into something beautiful, into some kind of art.

In this world, whether you're born in a *just* time or an *unjust* time, is a matter of *fate*. You have to surrender the very natural desire to fix everything before you're going to be happy, peaceful, and joyful. In this mythology, we're *sent* into this world to heal it, to save it. We don't reach the finish line. We're not able to fix the whole of things.

But when you manifest what it means to be fully human, you bring healing to the world. You bring light to the world. And when Jesus calls you the light of the world, he was saying he's not the only savior there is. Every one of us heals the world when we love, when we care, when against all odds we choose truth over lies, faithfulness over betrayal, healing over bitterness.

This is a very difficult time to be a human being. But it's always been difficult. And the great art of the world, the great mythologies of the world, tell us that we're not in a unique time. Most of humanity, through most of time, have lived in unfair times. And the reason that we have hope is because of the people who didn't shut down because the world was unfair. They kept giving their light.

Our story is telling us that we have roots that go into nature that are deeper than this storm, and that nature is not our backdrop, it's our essence. Our story is telling us that our suffering is not in vain, that you can't separate beauty and pain. And when pain is unavoidable, the people who choose to embrace it artistically are the ones that bring light to humankind in times of midnight. And finally, it's the people who stop trying to save the world and simply manifest what it means to be human, to love, to care, to create, to be honest.

None of us lives to get to the finish line. None of us gets the power to completely heal and fix the world. But it makes all the difference in the world, whether we choose love or fear. Just know that your purpose in life may very well be to bring light to this darkness, honesty to this time of gaslighting, and love to this time of cruelty.

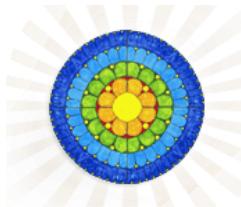
We'll take a moment now for you to think how you would interpret these words.

## Benediction

Rev. Erica Knisely

As you leave this place, may you feel firmly planted, your roots reaching down into the refreshing waters that flow deep beneath the troubles of this world, the waters of truth and goodness and beauty. Go in peace. Amen.

*Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.*



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