

FOR GOOD

Order of Service (bulletin)

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Video (recorded live stream)

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May 31, 2026

Pentecost 1

Genesis 1:1 - 2:4a

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. But the earth became chaos and emptiness, and darkness came over the face of the Deep - yet the Spirit of God was brooding over the surface of the waters. Then God said, "Light: be!" And light was. God saw that light was good, and God separated light from darkness. God called the light "Day" and the darkness "Night." Evening came, and morning followed - the first day. Then God said, "Now, make an expanse between the waters! Separate water from water!" So it was: God made the expanse and separated the water above the expanse from the water below it. God called the expanse "Sky." Evening came, and morning followed - the second day. Then God said, "Waters under the sky: be gathered into one place! Dry ground: appear!" So it was. God called the dry ground "Earth" and the gathering of the waters "Sea." And God saw that this was good. Then God said, "Earth: produce vegetation—plants that scatter their own seeds, and every kind of fruit tree that bears fruit with its own seed in it!" So it was: the earth brought forth every kind of plant that bears seed, and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it. And God saw that this was good. Evening came, and morning followed - the third day. Then God said, "Now, let there be lights in the expanse of the sky! Separate day from night! Let them mark the signs and seasons, days and years, and serve as luminaries in the sky, shedding light on the earth." So it was: God made the two great lights, the greater one to illumine the day, and a lesser to illumine the night. Then God made the stars as well, placing them in the expanse of the sky, to shed light on the earth, to govern both day and night, and separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good. Evening came, and morning followed - the fourth day. God then said, "Waters: swarm with an abundance of living beings! Birds: fly above the earth in the open expanse of the sky!" And so it was: God created great sea monsters and all sorts of swimming creatures with which the waters are filled, and all kinds of birds. God saw that this was good and blessed them, saying, "Bear fruit, increase your numbers, and fill the waters of the seas! Birds, abound on the earth!" Evening came, and morning followed—the fifth day. Then God said, "Earth, bring forth all kinds of living souls—cattle, things that crawl, and wild animals of all kinds!" So it was: God made all kinds of wild animals, and cattle, and everything that crawls on the ground, and God saw that this was good. Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, so be like us. Let them be stewards of the fish in the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, the wild animals, and everything that crawls on the ground." Humankind was created as God's reflection: in the divine image God created them; female and male, God made them. God blessed him and said, "Bear fruit, increase your numbers, and fill the earth—and be responsible for it! Watch over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all living things on the earth!" God then told them, "Look! I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the earth, and every tree whose fruit carries its seed inside itself: they will be your food; and to all the animals of the earth and the birds of the air and things that crawl on the ground - everything that has a living soul in it - I give all the green plants for food." So it was. God looked at all of this creation, and proclaimed that this was good—very good. Evening came, and morning followed - the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed. On the seventh day God had finished all the work of creation, and so, on the seventh day, God rested. God blessed the seventh day and called it sacred, because on it God rested from all the work of creation. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg



Thank goodness for mindless reality television: sports, The Property Brothers, endless number of home improvement shows or home house hunters, uh, The Housewives of wherever, Survivor, Big Brother, and all those escapist streaming shows. Now, I haven't watched Spider Noir next, so if you can avoid spoilers, that would be great.

Escape is good because the news most days is kind of hard to take. And that's true whether the story is international or continental or national or provincial or municipal or neighborhood. Even so, I'm not a fan myself of ignoring the lived reality of the community and communities around me. So, I try to keep up on the news for good or for bad.

It's always been present, I think, to some degree, but it's become much more the norm in this post-covid time that the news has become a matter of opinion. For many people, the veracity of the news is always filtered through their ideological lens. And if the spin doesn't match your subjective beliefs, then you might write off the news as fake. The saddest result of this rejection of any objective version of events is that people wind up being divided into opposing camps and that's where they have to stay. Camps where you say everyone in my group is good and right and those in the other groups are wrong or bad and sometimes even the word evil gets thrown around. The rejection of the possibility of objectivity means that there's very little chance that people are going to be open to any reason that might change their point of view. We live in echo chambers and if we don't agree with something then we simply tell the other person that you're just watching the wrong version of the news. Do your own research. Figure it out. Oh, you can't listen to them. They're fake.

It's said that there are two kinds of people in the world. There are the righteous and the unrighteous. And if you want to know who's who, you just have to ask the righteous because they seem to get to do all the dividing. They seem to know who is right and that's them. and therefore everyone else is wrong.

So much of modern discourse feeds on debates around what is good and what is bad. But it wasn't always that way.

You may have noticed in our scripture reading today that we stopped halfway through verse 4. Most Bible verses don't have an a or b subverse, but that's a shorthand for Bible study, saying that we're stopping at the obvious place to stop halfway through verse 4. If we'd have read on, starting in verse 2:4b, we would hear that it reads like the restart of the account of creation. Beginning at 2:4b, it says, "In that day that [Adonai] made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet on the earth ... for [Adonai] God had not caused it to rain upon the earth ... but a stream would rise from the earth and water the whole face of the earth." This sounds like we're starting over again. And for a number of reasons, biblical scholars recognize this as not a continuation of Genesis 1, but as a distinct and separate creation story, written by a different author from a different time and place.

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Scholars know that they are different authors from different times due to what is known as the Documentary Hypothesis of the authorship of the first five books of the Bible. It's kind of complicated but one of the one of the shorthands is what word do they use to describe God? Is it, like in Genesis 1, Elohim, just meaning God, or is it as in Genesis 2, the divine name of God, the YHWH, Yahweh, or often pronounced using the word Adonai. And if you think about these two stories in particular, the content of the pre-creation conditions is different. In Genesis 1, you've got water. Water everywhere. Chaotic, dark ocean. In number two, it's a dry, barren land with no life at all. It's a lifeless desert.

Although the *water to the known world in six days* version, Genesis 1, comes first in our Bibles, Genesis 2's dry land version is actually the older of the two, and it's much longer. If we want to read that whole creation story, we've got to read not only starting halfway through verse 4 of chapter 2, we've got to go all the way to the end of chapter 3. And the story continues with another related story going into chapter 4 and beyond. Genesis 2 probably found its written form somewhere in the 10th or 9th century before the common era. So 900 to 1,000 years before Jesus' time. Whereas Genesis 1 didn't arrive until about 400 years after that somewhere around the sixth century BCE.

Now, you thought that Genesis 1:1-2:4a was a long reading. There was a time this week when I was briefly tempted to read two more whole chapters this morning and get both creation stories out there. But instead, I'll just give you a quick summary of the older creation story.

- Earth is dry and it's barren. and water comes to the surface and that begins a cycle of life.
- God creates a living creature and a garden for that creature to live in. And the creature's job is to till and keep the garden.
- In the garden, God creates all sorts of trees, fruit trees particularly, and two special trees. a tree of life, which we don't hear anything more about, and a tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which is also apparently a fruit tree, but you can't eat that fruit or else you're going to die. Presumably, it's poisonous.
- This protohuman creature, God decides, shouldn't be alone. And so God begins to create all sorts of potential partners. Land animals, birds, doesn't mention fish, but maybe some fish were going to be companions. But none of them were suitable.
- So God put this creature to sleep and disassembled that creature, took a rib out, and created a second similar, but different creature. What's left of that first creature is now called man or male and the new creature is called woman or female. This is the first time gender appears in the Genesis 2 story. Don't be fooled by many English translations that translate adam (which simply means human as opposed to animal) as man. And people can hear that and think it means male. It just means not an animal. But the creation of a human partner is the point in the story where male and female appear as distinct: after the adam is taken apart and rebuilt.
- Then we hear that one of the creatures God made (presumably one of the unsuccessful partner attempts) is a serpent and it's a crafty creation of God. The serpent entices these humans to eat the forbidden fruit, claiming it's not poisonous. *You're not going to die, but it's going to give you knowledge. Knowledge of the full breadth of everything good and evil.* And instantly after they eat, they feel ashamed. They (all of a sudden) think that their bodies are somehow evil. And so they make clothes and they try to hide from God.
- God finds them and kicks them out of the garden and says as punishment:
 - men, you're going to have to really work hard for food now. It's going to be hard work to farm land.
 - And women, you're going to have a lot of pain when you have babies.
 - Oh, and snake, I didn't forget about you. You don't get to keep your legs. You're going to have to slither around on the ground.

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That Genesis 2 presentation of the first humans is that we are indecisive. We're kind of picky. Can't seem to decide on a partner. We're a bit naive. We're easy to manipulate because we're curious and gaining knowledge results in punishment.

This Genesis 2 story was out there for three or 4 hundred years when a temple priest penned an alternate version that was poetic more than narrative, more symbolic than anthropomorphic.

This priest rewrote a story about the contrast of good and evil into a version of creation that was described as very good.

This priest rewrote a story where humans are driven out of God's presence with hard lives and pain ahead of them into a version where humans are created in the very image of God.

This priest rewrote a version of creation where at least one tree was off limits, not because it was poisonous as implied, but because you might learn something. And the priest rewrote it into a version where every fruit is given for food, including the green plants.

This priest rewrote a story where female humans only emerge out of the mostly male original version. The first human creature was formed out of the earth itself. And the second creature needed ingredients of that first one. And there's an implication by that telling of the story that the second creature is lesser and subservient. And don't even get me into the fact that they're the first one to fall for the serpent's invitation to eat the fruit. This story is rewritten into a version where the divine image of God created humankind, male and female at the same time. No hierarchy in the Genesis 1 version.

Now, I know that it is possible to meld the Genesis 1 and two versions into a single story. You start in Genesis 2 where everything's dry, and then God causes water to come over the face of the earth. Then you can jump to Genesis 1 and say, see, now we're at the water part. Then God's goes on to create light over this chaotic dark ocean. We're going to get air. We're going to separate waters. You have to have waters above and waters below because we know water up there because it rains down at times. So, there's got to be water above the sky. And we know there's water below the earth because we can dig holes and find it. Sun, moon, stars, birds, fish, animals, humans. And then you can go back to Genesis 2 to describe how God might have created these humans. How a garden was there. The whole thing about the forbidden fruit and shame and evil becoming known with along with good; and being expelled for knowledge and being punished with hard lives.

But neither of these stories is literal history. Neither of these stories is literal history. *Sorry, Texas-based school textbook creators.* These are myths in the best sense of that word to simply explain how our present world exists. In a world that the culmination of God's creative endeavors is to focus on separation and hardship, Genesis 1's priestly author emerges and emphasizes that God's creation is actually intended not just to be good, but to be very good. And I find that inspiring in an era where all the messages around me encourage division and judgment.

- The righteous versus the right unrighteous,
- The worthy versus the unworthy,
- The chosen versus the abandoned,
- The right versus the wrong,
- The good versus the bad or evil.

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In that kind of era, in that environment, I do well myself to remember that God's creation was and is at its core good and to resist the call when others want to write it off as being beyond goodness. And, I believe it's incumbent on all of us to seek to bring that goodness back into the parts of our society that have forgotten the divine image that we all share, the goodness in which we are created.

And so when things get out of balance, we have work to do to recalibrate the scales.

Tomorrow we start a new month. June 1st is the beginning of Pride Month. It's an annual reminder that an assumption of the divine image is in every human life and that must be celebrated; and we will be celebrating amongst all of the voices that are contrary to that assertion. Those who will be bothered by the embrace that goodness exists in all. To those who might be bound to complain about why do we need to 2S&LGBTQIA+ pride, I say, well, stop creating the need and that we won't have the need anymore. Just stop hating on people.

Next Sunday is the fifth anniversary of Spirit of Hope making its decision to become an Affirming Ministry.

Also next Sunday (on the theme of the news), you can find an announcement in the Spark next week for an after for after-church opportunities in the fall to join others talking about the news, but maybe through our faith lenses, our moral and ideological and faith-based lenses. And I suspect that Genesis 1 might be part of the context that people will consider – to shed light on news. At least I hope so.

God brooded over the chaos and said, "This can be better." And so light brings perspective. That's good. There's environments for all kinds of life. That's good. And there's enough of the divine heart infused into humanity to be able to transform chaos into something very good.

It's not an accident that at the end of creation, the priestly author of Genesis 1 adds the extra adjective. It's not just "tov". It's not just good. It's "tov meod". It's very good. May this always be so. Amen.

#135MV Called By Earth and Sky

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