

**SECOND READING** Genesis 1:1-31 (*The Message*)

<sup>1-2</sup> First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss. <sup>3-5</sup> God spoke: "Light!" And light appeared. God saw that light was good and separated light from dark. God named the light Day, he named the dark Night. It was evening, it was morning—Day One.

<sup>6-8</sup> God spoke: "Sky! In the middle of the waters; separate water from water!" God made sky. He separated the water under sky from the water above sky. And there it was: ghe named sky the Heavens; It was evening, it was morning—Day Two.

<sup>9-10</sup> God spoke: "Separate! Water-beneath-Heaven, gather into one place; Land, appear!" And there it was. God named the land Earth. He named the pooled water Ocean. God saw that it was good. <sup>11-</sup>

<sup>13</sup> God spoke: "Earth, green up! Grow all varieties of seed-bearing plants, every sort of fruit-bearing tree." And there it was. Earth produced green seed-bearing plants, all varieties, and fruit-bearing trees of all sorts. God saw that it was good. It was evening, it was morning—Day Three.

<sup>14-15</sup> God spoke: "Lights! Come out! Shine in Heaven's sky! Separate Day from Night. Mark seasons and days and years, lights in heaven's sky to give light to Earth." And there it was. <sup>16-19</sup> God made two big lights, the larger to take charge of Day, the smaller to be in charge of Night; and he made the stars. God placed them in the heavenly sky to light up Earth and oversee Day and Night, to separate light and dark. God saw that it was good. It was evening, it was morning—Day Four.

<sup>20-23</sup> God spoke: "Swarm, Ocean, with fish and all sea life! Birds, fly through the sky over Earth!" God created the huge whales, all the swarm of life in the waters, And every kind and species of flying birds. God saw that it was good. God blessed them: "Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Ocean! Birds, reproduce on Earth!" It was evening, it was morning—Day Five.

<sup>24-25</sup> God spoke: "Earth, generate life! Every sort and kind: cattle and reptiles and wild animals—all kinds." And there it was: wild animals of every kind, cattle of all kinds, every sort of reptile and bug. God saw that it was good.

<sup>26-28</sup> God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth." God created human beings; he created them godlike, reflecting God's nature. He created them male and female. God blessed them: "Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth." <sup>29-30</sup> Then God said, "I've given you every sort of seed-bearing plant on Earth and every kind of fruit-bearing tree, given them to you for food. To all animals and all birds, everything that moves and breathes, I give whatever grows out of the ground for food." And there it was. <sup>31</sup> God looked over everything he had made; it was so good, so very good! It was evening, it was morning— Day Six. This is the word of the Lord. THANKS BE TO GOD.

**FIRST READING:** Rev. 4: 9-11

<sup>9</sup> Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

<sup>11</sup> "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God**

***“I Believe in God, the Father, Maker” (Apostles’ Creed)***

The word “creed” comes from the Latin, *credo* which means, “I believe”. This is the beginning of the Apostles’ Creed, the confession of the Church that we will be considering during the first part of the summer. The Creeds which the PCUSA have adopted (12) were written by people who passionately felt they needed to make a statement or answer a question of religious importance during the trying times and places they lived. No Creed says everything we believe, but together they all encompass the tenets of our Faith and thus make up the first book of our Constitution.

Regarding the Apostles’ Creed: it is believed to have been written in the 2-3<sup>rd</sup> c AD and finalized in the 5<sup>th</sup>. The question that was causing great debate in the church at that time and that was addressed by the Creed was; *“Is the God of the Old Testament the same God as the God of Jesus Christ?”*<sup>1</sup> The Creed is written in a Trinitarian format, and it begins with the affirming belief in the first person. That’s where we will begin too, considering what we believe about God the Creator and why, and then why that matters.

While I suppose there will always be people (in this case, atheists) who will resist the obvious, who will justify their own hostile and prejudiced ideas,<sup>2</sup> in regard to God, believers have long stared at the night-sky and with awe and wonder proclaimed, *“O Lord, Our Lord, how majestic is your name...when I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers...what are human beings that you are mindful of them?”* It has seemed unthinkable to us that creation should either have always existed or that it has spontaneously generated out of nothing with no One to create it. We have understood God, not only as a force of nature but as an entity, a Being, with both intelligence and power, one capable of creating the universe with its 100 billion to maybe 100 trillion galaxies, and we believe that God created it all out of nothing. *“Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness,”* as Eugene Peterson says, *“before “God’s Spirit brooded over it.”* Further, the order evident in creation,

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Raube. *“Apostles’ Creed I: God, the Maker”*. <https://upcendicott.org/worship/2023/6/4/trinity-sunday-god-calling> (accessed 6-9-23)

<sup>2</sup> Adam Hamilton. *Creed. What Christians Believe and Why*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press; 2016), 19.

the natural laws, the complexity of what we can observe, including human beings capable of reason, seem further evidence of a Mind behind the Creation.

As the source then “*from which everything that exists derives its existence and upon which all that exists is contingent*”, we also believe God has all the attributes of personhood: emotion, reason, logic, will. God feels. God weeps. God loves. And in addition, we know that we are made as a reflection of this. Whatever makes us persons is a reflection of this! We are “not just the random functioning of various forces, but of the intellect, creativity, joy, and beauty of the Creator.”<sup>3</sup> At the very high point of the creation account, after God brought order out of chaos, separated water and dry land, put the sun and moon in place, vegetation on the earth, and animals in their places, God created human beings and said something that God said about no other creature: “*Let us make them in our image*”. We are, you and I, made in the *Imago Dei*, the image of God.

And not only this, but at the core of God’s being is One who seeks out an intimate personal relationship with us and the created world. God doesn’t want to be distant and detached. God doesn’t want to start things rolling and then sit back and watch. In Kathryn Tanner’s words, “*it is actually the nature of God to freely replicate to every degree possible the abundant fullness of life, light and love, [which God is], outwardly in what is not God.*”<sup>4</sup> Right.

Now, sadly, we have refused, as humans, over time to receive this offered relationship. Through the freewill given us, we have refused. But nevertheless, our God has tenaciously endeavored to overcome our sinful opposition. God has graciously and lovingly worked through creation, through covenant with Israel, and finally, especially through God’s own incarnation in Jesus Christ to be in relationship, in perfect relationship with us. For this reason, the term “Father” is used in the Creed, not to preference a gender for God (no, God is Spirit, much bigger and greater than gender), but to speak of the One whom Jesus tenderly and intimately called God, “Abba”(Daddy) and who called us beloved children. (*Pause*)

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<sup>3</sup> Adam Hamilton

<sup>4</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity. A Brief Systematic Theology.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 2.

Ok, so we believe in God as the Creator of all there is. And we know the universe itself points to the existence of this God... *"the heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim God's handiwork"*. We recognize that it is in God's image that we've been made, and that God's great desire has been and forever will be to be in relationship with us. This we know.

So why does it matter? Why does it matter? Well, the answer is in the first verses of Scripture. *God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image...so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle and the Earth itself."* Walter Bruggemann says this a radically inverted and revolutionary idea of God *"as one who governs by gracious self-giving. We are not chattel and servants, but agents of God to whom much is given and from whom much is expected."*<sup>5</sup> Friends, the reason it matters is that we matter to God! The image of God is in us AND we are given responsibility for God's creation. As John Buchanan says, God has a high view of us as well as high hopes for us.<sup>6</sup>

This means that caring for it---tending to it --is an act of discipleship and a responsibility of every human being. We are currently facing the hard, scientific fact that our planet stands on the brink of destruction, and this is because of humanity's disregard and irreverence for the Creator's wondrous handiwork. Already, we are seeing the extinction of many animal species, the melting of ice in Arctic areas, the exposure of the earth's people to extreme heat waves, to severe drought, and the elevation of sea levels. Billions of dollars of damage and loss of life is happening through flooding, wildfires and storms. Climate disasters have impacted organisms and ecosystems, reduced crop quality and yields, and greatly increased the degree of human starvation and undernourishment.

*The need to act in regard to this crisis that God's planet is in, is more urgent than urgent can be. I was reminded this week of that urban legend of the frog that when put in a pot of boiling water will instantly leap out. But if put it in a pot filled with tepid water, which is gradually heated, will remain in the water until it boils to death. I guess the legend is actually false...frogs are smarter than this...but the warning rings clear for us humans who tend to*

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<sup>5</sup> Walter Bruggemann. *"Genesis: Interpretation, vol 1"* James Mays, ed (Atlanta: John Knox Press;1982), 33.

<sup>6</sup> John Buchanan. *"A God who Hopes and Expects"* <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2010/102410.html> (accessed 6-8-23).

*ignore the signs that begin to show around us until it's too late. The planet's crisis is now and we, God's stewards, need act as we can as quickly as we can.*

With 8 billion people on the planet now, even seemingly small things that we do can have an enormous impact. One thing is to seriously advocate for alternatives to the fuels we use since the scientific consensus is that burning of fossil fuels is a leading cause of much of this problem. In particular, we need support organizations who hold companies accountable in regard to their adherence to good refining and emission practices. We also can/need reduce our own carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions by using less plastics and paper, recycling, simply decreasing our energy use at home, switching off the lights, turning up or down the thermostat and thinking about fuel economy when we buy our next car. Switching to renewable energy providers, if we can, buying locally produced and seasonal food, eating more plant-based meals, using up what food we have, and composting leftovers are good things. And finally, we can plan to pay a bit more because ecofriendly products cost more, investing in our future and God's children's future.

*"I believe in God, the Father, the Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth..."* Brothers and sisters, I invite you, this week, to ponder who and why we believe in God, the Maker. Maybe step outside on some dark night and look up or pull up a chair near a garden brimming with flowers to do so. Listen, smell, taste, look, feel. Know yourself cradled in the arms of your Creator, and feel the love unending given you. And when you have pondered who and why we believe, then consider why our belief matters...why it matters? And may the fact that you matter to the Creator, that all Creation matters to the Creator, be your astounding conclusion. Friends, let love, mirroring love be your response. Amen.

~~*James Gustafson, a very distinguished scholar of theological ethics from Univ of Chicago and Vanderbilt University, was attending a cocktail party when a colleague from the Chemistry department, a little too smugly, challenged him to say something theological. Gustafson thought for a moment and said, “God”!<sup>7</sup> Yes, God. Almighty God.*~~

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<sup>7</sup> Douglas Ottati. *Interpretation*, (Oct. 2005). Quoted in John Buchanan. “A God who Hopes and Expects” <https://www.fourthchurch.org/sermons/2010/102410.html> (accessed 6-8-23).