

## **“It all Begins with...” (Creation)**

**Genesis 1      John 1**

Today, I begin a series, “Preparing for Lent.” The series will proceed like this. During February, I will preach four sermons on four Christian doctrines: Creation, Providence, Justification, Sanctification. I use these short hand terms to quickly identify the four topics. They are the foundational beliefs for those of us who call ourselves Christian.

Our overall theme to prepare for Lent and also for the Lenten Season is “Talking the Talk *and* Walking the Walk.” We will talk through February affirming the basic beliefs of our

Christian faith and then in the Season of Lent, we shall apply these beliefs to how we live or how we are “walking the walk!”

Our Book of Order has eight historic principles that underpin foundation of our denomination. Historic Principle #4 is titled, “Truth and Goodness.” It declares that there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty.” It goes on to say, “Otherwise it would be of no consequence either to discover the truth or to embrace it!” It is saying in essence there has to be some connection between what we say we believe and how we live our lives. So, in

February we will explore the truths we hold to be foundational. In March we will explore how we live out those truths.

Because the February series will be more educational in nature than sermonic, we have provided on the back of your bulletin a place to jot some notes. In addition, the sermons will be posted on the church's website for additional reference.

I am highly indebted to Professor Shirley Guthrie, former Professor of Theology at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia, for his book, Christian Doctrine to keep me on

the straight and narrow. The book would be an excellent year-long adult study.

So, on with Talking the Talk!

We begin with the doctrine of Creation. Rather important to begin at the beginning. The creation story in Genesis which we read is a beautiful story about creation. It is a faith statement. It is a description of what the early Hebrews knew about creation. Here, we encounter an issue right at the beginning: the story in Genesis is not a scientific account of creation. The people writing it were not there at the beginning! We also encounter another challenge about the second

creation story in chapter 2 in Genesis.

Which one do we believe?

We believe both! And why do we believe both? Because they are faith statements about what God did! Not about our reporting accuracy. Not about scientific discoveries. Not about a fool proof way to prove Creation. Remember God was at the beginning. Remember also God created out of nothing!

God spoke and there was light and darkness.

God spoke and there were animals and trees and rivers and mountains.

God spoke and made male and female in God's image.

So, the creation stories are about God. They are about what God did. They are about his power and majesty. They are about God's values. God made everything and therefore everything belongs to God! Psalm 24 reminds us "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." It all belongs to God. And God finished the work and declared it was good! All of it. Everything. Completely good!

In this first chapter of Genesis, God sets forth some rather startling proclamations and claims:

1. God created everything.

Therefore, everything belongs to God. Nothing in life or this world is outside God's purview or domain.

2. God's creation had value because God had created it. If not, why would he have created it? To God, all of life is precious include people, animals, seas, hills, valleys.

3. God declared that humanity had dominion over all the earth. So, we became God's partners in running the world.

Now, let's explore further who this God is: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as we understand God. There are a number of theories about God which can

cause confusion. I would suggest that no one theory or idea of God can capture or describe God totally. Let's see.

THEISM is a theory about God. It comes from the Greek word "theos" which means God. A theist believes in the reality of God as opposed to an atheist who does not. In general, Christians hold to this idea of being theistic.

Theism is the notion of a God who is distant from and superior over creation. It is hard sometimes in this theory to see the loving and intimate connection between God and his creation. Yet when we declare in the Apostles' Creed, "I believe

in God the Father, Almighty...,” we combine power and love. Power of God being Almighty and in charge plus God the Father as being caring for family and creation.

Again, one word cannot possibly catch up all the understanding of who this God is and who is over all and yet with all.

PANTHEIST is a second term used to describe God. Pan means “all” and “theos,” again, means God. In other concepts indicating that everything comes from God, pantheism says everything **IS** God. So, we declare the trees outside are

God. You and I are God. The building in which we sit is God.

While pantheism has been declared a heresy, it does help somewhat about the connectivity of God and creation. It does declare God’s constant presence with us and for us. God sharing all of life with us.

The confusion comes about the Creator and the creation. Pantheists can make the argument that they place their hope in what they can and what they must do to save the world and themselves. It becomes a confusing concept.

**THIRD: PANENTHEISM:** declares everything that exists is **IN** God. The world is in God and God is in the world!

It becomes a way of declaring God is omnipresent and ever-present. It declares that God is behind and above; under and in front of. We come from God. We live not only from but in God! Panentheism does not help in describing God.

So regardless of the pros and cons of these three God-descriptions, we have to declare finally that God is ultimately a mystery. We declare that God is a transcendent God independent from the world and all in it, but also an immanent God who is present and at work in the created world and everything in it. (Guthrie, pages, 157-158).

That's God. The creator of the world. The one who is over all things.

Next, what about this creation which God has created? God's creation is good like God declared in Genesis 1. So, what is amazing about that? What is amazing about the three score and ten years we have on this earth or the four score some of us experience being a good thing. In God's creation, temporal life is valuable. And the time we have is opportunity for us to make a contribution.

In other words, your life is significant and important. Not because you made the life-saving invention of the

century or because you are a good person or because you are wealthy. NO, you are worthwhile and valuable because God created you. God created time and gave us an opportunity to do something with it.

Back to the creation story. God declared that we humans have dominion over the face of the earth and all that is in it. With that gift, we are called and responsible to do something with it. To do something that is a gift to and for someone else.

God also declared in the creation the value of human life and dignity. Because you breathe as a child of God, you are inherently valuable and valued. Again,

your value comes because God created you.

The other part of the good God did in creation is our sexuality. The church through the centuries has devalued sexuality and declared it bad. Yet God gave us our sexuality declaring for us to multiply and subdue the earth. If God created us as sexual beings, it has to be good. Yet, we work hard to declare how we misuse our sexuality. How “bad” sex, male and female, is. How strict one is to be about sexuality. Yet our sexuality is a gift and is sacred. It is not something to be talked about only behind closed doors or in hushed tones. We are sexual beings

and if we need to blame anyone for that, God is the source!

All of which is good about Creation. How God's Creation is good and valuable. That is where we start as Christians: from this basic premise whereas a lot of us start from the premise of sin and wickedness. Which, of course, we get to because of sin; yet, the beginning point of our faith is that God created the world. Everything belongs to God. Everything that God created was declared good. And that foundation is central in our Christian faith.

I conclude with a couple reminders about this good creation that God has

made. First, there is nothing in this world to be feared. While there are some rather unknown features of life in the world, nothing has a stronghold on us that would make us live in fear. God as creator is in charge. With faith and trust in God, we need not fear for God is with us and God is for us.

That being said there is nothing in this world that is to be worshipped. One of the great temptations of our humanity is to create an idol. A great temptation is to create a competing God. A temptation is that we might think we know the difference between good and evil - which was the struggle of Adam and Eve in the



Garden. Yet, the only being worthy of our worship is God Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth!

God is our focus. And every time we stray from that central affirmation, we slip and slide. God the Creator has set everything in order and made for us all we are and all we need. So, when we think about Creation, it is far more than human beings and trees and animals. It is not just about the creations. It really is all about God and the values which are evident in the creation story. To repeat:

-All of creation belongs to God. You, me, all of us and all of our possessions.

-God stamped his values on creation and declared them good and therefore holy.

-God called us to be responsible agents over God's creation.

When you think about it, what else is there? What else can be said? Except, "It all begins with God..."