Extraordinary Earth

Genesis 1:1-2:3

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For many years it was the tradition in our house that on each of our three children’s birthdays we would get out the photo albums that captured the birth and first few years of life of the celebrated child and then we would retell the story of how they came into the world. There are shots of each child in the very moments after their birth; pictures of them in hospital bassinets, in grandparents’ arms for the first time, and coming home for the first time. Over the years the kids were, depending on their age, alternately enthralled or grossed out at this tradition, but despite weak, verbal protests, they would come and sit close, to look at their pictures and to hear their own story told again and again. We like to know where we come from.

Meet someone for the first time and often the conversation turns in the direction of “home”: where do you live? Where do you come from? In some family systems and cultural traditions, where you come from, where your roots are, what clan or tribe or household you claim as your own says as much or more about you than what you can say for yourself. Knowing where we come from is a primal part of our identity; some of us expend great resources to reconnect or even disconnect from our source.

And so as we continue to think in this worship series about becoming more like Christ, it seems appropriate that we spend some time thinking about where we’ve come from, whose we are, in what manner and spirit we were given birth, especially if we claim to share parentage with the One we endeavor to follow.

Genesis chapters one and two tell two variations of the story of our creation. Chapter two is an old, old story and chapter one, not quite as old as chapter two relatively speaking, is a hymn-like retelling of how everything came into being; it’s formulaic and artistically written. Both stories tell us much about the created cosmos, the earth and it’s residents, and specifically humanity. And both stories tell us something about the God who brought it all into being. As we consider the text again, let’s think about where we come from.

Genesis tells us that *we come from a God who sees.* Notice how many times in the text the words, “and God saw” are repeated. We come from a God who has God’s eye on everything there is, even as it comes into being. God saw what was missing and created it; God saw what was created and blessed it. We come from a watchful God who’s glance does not missing a single thing. We come from a God who sees.

*We come from a world that’s good*. Over and over throughout the story of the origins of all things we are told that God sees what has come to pass and declares it good. Notice that is doesn’t say it has the *potential* to be good, or it *will grow into being good* or it just might, if we’re *lucky*, turn out good, all things being equal. There are *no qualifiers* on this proclamation: “And God saw that it was good”. It simply is how things are. Goodness is inherent in everything that was made; it’s part of its fabric, it’s built into a thing or a being’s DNA. It’s difficult sometimes to remember that our world, broken and hurting and full of strife and turmoil as it is, was and is created good. The good news is that there is no expiration date on that goodness. Believe it or not, that goodness has not run out nor has it changed into something less than good. We come from a God who made all things---us included—good!

*We come from the image of the Divine*. Only humans are made in the “image, the likeness” of God. Both female and male, at the same time in chapter one, co-created and co-blessed. We come from the very substance of God: what better pedigree could you want? What that means is difficult to articulate, only that something of that seeing, something of that goodness, something of that light and dark must be a part of each of us. And it also means that we are potentially closer to being like Jesus than we might think: if indeed you believe that Jesus is both God and human, then surely the God-ness he embodied is something akin to the God-ness each and every one of us possess! Pretty incredible to think about! How even more possible to be like Christ!

We come from a God who sees, from a creation that is good, from the very image of the Divine, and *we come from a creation that is entrusted* to our compassion and care. This is where things have gotten tricky.

You see, traditionally many have read the text the way they want to hear it (we do that pretty often ourselves, don’t we?!) We have read the text to say that humans are *in charge* and can do *whatever they want* with the rest of creation. Gen 1:26 reads, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the seas, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” The operative word here is what: “Dominion” No wonder we are worn out, dominating all that stuff!

But “dominating” as we think about it in these days is not what the biblical author had in mind. Created in the image of the divine being, we are given the “divine caretaking role” over everything else: to care for the earth and its creatures as GOD would care for it! Just as God did not make day to rule over night or sea creatures to rule over land creatures; just as God does not, here in Gen 1 or 2, give men to rule over women or women over men, God does *not* give us creation to exploit it, to rule over it, to dominate it! No, God commands us to care for it *just as God would care for it*; to show the same benevolence as the loving, goodness-filled creator would show. Creation is made in harmony and partnership; only in the description of brokenness, sin and punishment does dominance come into play. “As the Hebrew language literally put it, human beings were created to “serve (creation) and to keep it”, to sustain and preserve God’s purpose of creation. In other words, we are to serve the earth…in a way that honors’ God’s intention and purpose.”

In becoming caretakers of the earth in the name and spirit of God, we are truly becoming more like Christ, in whom, Paul says, we are not “male and female” but co-caretakers and partners one with the other! To seek justice and fairness and compassion and partnership with the earth and the entire cosmos is to reflect exactly the image of God, exactly the likeness of Jesus Christ! We come from a God who invites us to become more and more and more like Godself, from the moment of creation until today.

And so how do we do that? Well, in my lifetime we have gone from a throw away society to a society of recyclers, or re-users, and that certainly helps to care for creation. But is that enough? What else can we do, each one of us, everyday? Do you know that there is literally no way to get rid of plastic? Plastic can be cut up, melted down, broken apart but all any of that does is reduce it in size: to this day there is no way to disassociate the chemical bonds that form when we create plastic. We can reduce its size but not destroy it! So every single item made of plastic since the beginning of plastics, which was 1907, is still in existence on our planet, and will be until we figure out how to unmake it.

And that’s just one part of a larger concern. Our water, air, seas, forests, desserts, all need our attention, the attention of loving, benevolent God- appointed, Christ-like caretakers to nourish, protect, restore, refresh our natural habitat—and whatever other habitats lie in the distance. We reflect God’s image and become more Christ-like when we take seriously our world’s needs and our role in protecting, advocating for, caring for and appreciating this gift God has given us. We come from a God who gave us responsibility of our extraordinary earth; how we respond is connected to how Christ-like we can really be.

And finally *we come from a God who rests*. We put lots of stock in being busy, in filling our calendars and getting things done. Clearly, from the description in Gen 1, God is no slouch when it comes to making things happen. But God is also wise in knowing when it’s time to stop. We come from a God who is wise, who is strong in the assurance that rest brings restoration and wholeness to all things. Rest allows us to regroup, to take stock, to reflect and to simply be…in the wonder of all that is around us. We come from a God who rests, and whose rest was imitated by Jesus as he sat by the sea, ate with friends, gathered little children around him to laugh and play, sought solitude for prayer. Even as we rest, so the earth has need for restoration and replenishment; our respect for God’s rest and our own needs also to extend to the earth.

We come from an extraordinary God who has created an extraordinary earth. How blessed are we to be a part of this marvelous creation. As we consider how it is we can become more like Christ, I invite you to remember where you come from; remember who’s tribe, clan, family you are a part of! You come from a God who sees, who declares everything—including you!—good; a God who embeds God’s divine image on each and every one of us. We come from a God who charges us to take care of all creation with the same equity, love, justice and compassion as God offers to us. And then to enjoy it; to rest.

We come from good stock, we people of God; **all people do**! Remember your heritage and know that as we claim the hand from which we come, we are also living more fully into the image of the One shared with us, even Christ.