

Worship at home
April 25, 2021

Fourth Sunday of Easter



garden image <https://www.thinkersbiblestudies.com/dead-file/eden-story>

God calls us to worship

The Lord is risen!

Hallelujah! He is risen indeed!

Hymn #814 “Morning has broken”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l75cziYEUw>

We bring our praise and confessions

Lord God, our good and loving shepherd,

You nourish our lives and lead us into green pastures.

You restore our souls with rest and peace.

You give us true joy so our cup overflows with goodness.

You walk with us through the darkest valleys,
offering us courage and compassion.

At all times and in all circumstances, you are with us,

Creator, Redeemer and Guiding Spirit,

so, we praise you, Holy One, now and always. Amen.

Patient God, your mercy is abundant and your love endless.

Trusting in your mercy,

we confess that often we have continued to give way to sin in our lives,

we have trusted our own wisdom instead of learning from you,

we have lived according to our desires

rather than allowing your image to shine through us,

Forgive us for falling short of your hopes for us

and renew a right spirit within us.

God assures us of his forgiveness

The mercy of our God is from everlasting to everlasting.
Friends, hear and believe the good:
In Jesus Christ, God's generous love reaches out to embrace us.
We are forgiven and set free to begin again.
Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,
his love endures forever.

**In response to the gospel,
we confess our faith and offer our lives and resources**

I believe in God,
the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried,
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

*If you are a member or adherent of either of the Moore Presbyterian congregations,
please remember to submit your offering to the appropriate treasurer. For contact
information, speak with Rev. Ian.*

God speaks to us through his Word

Reading the Beginning through Resurrection Lenses: Sculptures in the Sand

In our last sermon we read the liturgical poem recorded in Genesis 1 that praises the Creator for His work. In that poem we encounter a God who delights in order and rhythm and in the co-operation of complementary groups: light and dark, dry land and sea, humanity and divinity.

Genesis 2 also records the creation of the world and humanity. However, it does so in a very different way from Genesis 1.

And this is the story for today as we seek to Read the Beginning through Resurrection Lenses.

READ GENESIS 2:4-25.

1. In Genesis 1, after everything else was created and placed in its proper category, God spoke humanity into existence. He did spoke into creation both male and female humans seemingly simultaneously and with the provision that they be in his image; that they be icons of the divine; that they be fruitful and multiply (and so be co-creators with God); that they have dominion over the earth and subdue it (and so be co-rulers with God.)

In Genesis 2, *before* anything else was put into place, while the earth was still a muddy swamp, “the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground.”

There are three words that are used which require our attention. They are different in English and they are different in Hebrew:

(i) *Earth*. “In the day that the LORD God made the *earth* and the heavens”, “when no plant of the field was yet in the *earth*”, “the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the *earth*.” Earth refers to the solid mass that is neither sky nor sea. The land in all its forms: sand, soil, rock, and swamp.

(ii) *Ground*, is a feminine noun, ‘*adamah*’ which refers to that part of the earth which is fertile. Soil. Interestingly, when the word “adam” shows up, the masculine noun that refers to man, it is very similar to the word ‘*adamah*’.

(iii) And thirdly, *dust*, is a dry, nutrient-free rubble. Dust is sand. The Hebrew word for dust: *‘aphar*, is also used to describe the by-product of crushing up idols made out of stone. It’s worthless.

From the dry, lifeless *dust* of the fertile *ground*, the Lord God fashioned man.

It’s helpful to visualize what’s happening: at this point, man was little better than a sand castle. Then, the Lord God breathed into his nostrils and the man became a living being.

Then the Lord God gave man purpose and boundaries: to care for the garden, to till it and keep it.

The commission given in Genesis 2 greatly informs the commission to have dominion and subdue the land given in Genesis 1. The nature of man’s dominion over creation is not that of an exploitative tyrant, but of a steward, a caretaker. Notice that the garden is not the man’s native home. The Lord God *put* the man whom he had formed *into* the garden.

We are residents of the Garden by God’s initiative and we return to the Garden by God’s grace!

The garden belongs to God. It is a sacred space. A space where the divine and human spheres meet, in which God is fully present with his people, and from which flows the divine blessings to the four corners of the world. Yet, God is the master gardener. God planted the garden and delights in its fruitfulness and beauty. Man is invited to be the Gardener’s assistant.

After the man had been at his work for some time, God realized that “It is not good that the man should be alone.” And so, God began to find him a helper as his partner.

The idea here is one of complementarity. By finding a partner who was not the same but who fit with the man such that they both complemented one another, God

ensured that the two would help each other care for the garden and thus represent the invisible Master Gardener in this visible garden.

God began with the animals. The naming of the animals recognizes the partnership between the man and the animals. They aren't soulless beasts who only exist to serve the man as robots. They co-exist and work together for the health and beauty of the garden.

However, the necessary complementarity was not found among the animals so God created Woman from one of the man's ribs.

2. My focus for the sermons of this Easter season is on Reading the Beginning through Resurrection Lenses. In essence, this means trying to resolve how these origin stories are still essential for 21st century Christians; disciples who follow the risen Jesus in the context of video conferencing, and space travel, and medical science, and nearly ubiquitous computing and artificial intelligence.

Eugene Peterson wrote that "We enter this text to meet God as He reveals himself."¹ Our primary goal in reading scripture is not to get something out of it for ourselves, but to better understand, and even to better know, the God of whom the scriptures testify. So, the primary question to ask is not: "How does this apply to my life?" but: "What is God telling me about himself, what is God revealing to me about the nature of humanity, and then how does my life fit into His story?" Reading scripture in this way requires a shift in our pattern of thinking away from assuming we are the center and towards assuming God is the center. Accepting by faith that God – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sustainer of all that is. God is the bigger context into which we are invited to fit our lives if we so choose.

3. When we do that, we see this God who delights in order and rhythm, and the co-operation of complementary groups is also a God of awe-some tenderness and mercy, who knows the needs of his creation and reaches out to share his life with us:

We see the vegetative world in need of a caretaker,
so, the Lord God placed the man in the garden to till it and keep it;

¹ Eugene Peterson, *Eat this Book*, pg. 67.

We see the animal kingdom in need of dignity and advocacy,
so, God appoint Man to give names to all cattle, and to the living creatures,
and to the birds of the air – names mean that you matter;
We see man in need of a helper, so God created woman;
We see woman in need of a helper,
so, Man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife as one flesh.

4. Next week we'll learn what happens when human beings get their priorities mixed up. Although we are made in God's image, animated by the divine breath, given dominion in creation, partner with God in tending the garden, and are even invited to share with God in creating future images of the Holy, we are not God.

There are limits to our wisdom.

We are not always able to perceive the full extent of the consequences to our actions, even if we think they are good in the moment!

This is the paradox:

By the Lord's grace, we are icons of all that is good, life-giving, and holy;
by Jesus' death and resurrection, we are reclaimed from the chaos of sin, justified, and declared worthy to walk in the realm of the divine;
yet,

Without the Lord God's irrigating waters, we are but dust.

Without the Lord God's resurrecting fire, we are but ash.

Without the Lord God's life-giving breath, we are but sculptures in the sand.

Hymn #389 "Breathe on me, breath of God"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5keJHZdWYM>

We respond with faith and service

Gracious and loving God,
as a shepherd cares for the flock, so you care for each one of us.
Move in our hearts and minds, our congregations and communities,
and lead us to care for one another for the sake of Jesus.
Today we thank you for the gift of rest.
We pray for all those who are tired from work or worry.
Grant peace to those who are worn out with anxiety or frustration,
and rest for all those who are weary from the responsibilities of their work.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God our Guide,
we thank you for the gifts of truth and wisdom.
We pray for those who cannot discern truth in the midst of conspiracy theories,
and for all who suffer under authorities who distort reality for their own ends.
Grant wisdom and common sense to all who must make decisions
in these confusing days of competing arguments.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God our Strength,
we thank you for the ways you refresh our souls.
We pray for those whose lives are burdened with poverty
or with uncertainty about the future beyond the pandemic.
We remember all who face any sort of trial or difficulty,
those who are sick, in pain, or facing death,
and those who are bereaved by the loss of someone dear.
For all of these precious souls, be their source of healing and peace.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God our Shield and Defender,
we thank you for staying with us when we face danger or death.
We pray for all those who live in fear:
prisoners, exiles and refugees,
victims of oppression, racism and hatred,
those who know the threat of violence day after day.
Be for them a steady companion and their source of courage.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God our Provider,
we thank you for all the ways you fill our cup to overflowing.
Thank you for offering peace and calm in the midst of turmoil,
for the return of happiness after times of strife,
and for insight emerging after confusion and indecision.
Help us recognize your redeeming gifts which guide us and give us hope.
Show us how we can be part of your redeeming work
unfolding in the world around us.
Bless those who serve in challenging missions in Canada
and around the world.
Equip them well to reach out in love and respect, together with local partners,
to accomplish your will in Jesus' name.
Hear us as we offer the prayer that Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

God sends us with His blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you,
the Lord be kind and gracious to you,
the Lord look upon you with favour,
and grant you peace. Amen.