

Sermons at Union Congregational Church

Preached by The Reverend Gail L. Miller, Pastor

March 3, 2013

Third Sunday in Lent

Psalm 104

Colossians 1:15-23

Creed 3

...Creator of Heaven and Earth...

The version of the creed that many of us may be familiar with, says "Maker" rather than "Creator." And there is an important distinction between these two.

To make suggests making something out of something else the way a person makes wooden boxes out of wood.

To create suggesting making something out of nothing the way a person makes paintings or poems. And while it is true that the artist, like the carpenter, has to use something else - paint, words - still the beauty or meaning she makes is different from the material she makes it out of.

To create is to make something essentially new.

When God created the Creation he made something where before there had been nothing, as the author of the book of Job puts it, "the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy" at the sheer and shimmering novelty of the thing.

You know how creative types are. Finicky, temperamental, difficult, sometimes a bit prima donna-ish. Can you imagine God hanging out before anything existed saying, "I just can't work in this environment; how can I be expected to be creative with such dull surroundings? I want light! I want sky! I want air! I want water! I want plants! I want animals! I want people!"

And just like that, there they were: light, sky, air, water, plants, animals, people. Creation is such an important topic in the Bible that many passages are dedicated to it. (Genesis 1-2; Psalms 104, 8 and 19; Job 38-41; Proverbs 8:22-31; John 1:1-14)

Years ago a friend told me about another friend of his who was put on trial by his church for not believing exactly what his church wanted him to believe about creation. When asked, "What do you believe about how the world was created?" They wanted him to say, "I believe the world was created in six 24-hour days." Instead he said, "I believe exactly what the Bible says about creation."

His point? There are lots of biblical passages about creation, not just one. You can't measure the biblical view of creation with a stopwatch.

Especially because there is more than one Creation story in the Genesis. There are actually two different versions of the Creation that describe it differently.

So what does the Bible say about creation? Here are some basics.

Who

The Bible is clear on who created everything: The one God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It might seem obvious, but creation and God are separate - God is in all creation, but creation is not God. We don't worship frogs or hills, but the Creator of frogs and hills.

When Once-and-for-all and still-happening

Here's the thing about Creation, there really isn't any detailed time frame for when it started and how long it lasted. Sure, Genesis talks about seven days, but that's probably more of an attempt to explain the seven day week than anything else. So when is Creation? What time period are we talking about here?

In the simplest sense Creation is the time before "history" begins. This is pre-anything that we know of, pre-stone age, pre-Paleolithic era, pre-primordial goo, pre-everything. In other words, we're talking a long time ago, and just how long ago is hard to say.

Try this: read Genesis 1 and make a list of all the things that God created directly (with no help such as the earth in v. 9) and all the things that God created indirectly; for example, God uses the earth to "bring forth" plants (v. 11) and animals (v. 24).

The point? Creation happened once but is still happening. This is most obvious with people. God creates us indirectly through our parents.

Creation is still going on right now! This is true of our world around us - things grow and are made and are discovered every day; it is true of our bodies - we may not "grow" anything new, but our bodies are constantly regenerating dead cell tissue; and if the stellar and galactic physicists are correct (and let's face it - they probably are) the universe is continuing to grow and expand. So creation is now. It is still. It is the way God continues to work on/in/around the world. (Skrade, *Crazy Book*)

Using the same old materials of earth, air, fire, and water, every twenty-four hours God creates something new out of them. If you think you're seeing the same show all over again seven times a week, you're crazy. Every morning you wake up to something that in all eternity never was before and never will be again. And the you that wakes up was never the same before and will never be the same again either. (Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*)

Creation is that which God alone is capable of doing - often through other creatures. God's once-upon-a-time and still-at-it work of bringing stuff into existence.

Why

Here is a question that science cannot answer. Why does creation exist? The Bible says that God created everything for the sake of goodness and for the sake of love. Psalm 104 says that God even created some creatures, like Leviathan, for the fun of it, to laugh at! I'd put camels and kangaroos in that camp as well.

But science can answer a lot of questions that the Bible can't! Science is the joyful study of God's creation. The Bible, obviously, is not a science textbook, nor does it claim to be.

Galileo said, "I believe the intention of the Holy Bible is to persuade us toward salvation, something science could never do; only the Holy Spirit can move us. But I do not think we must believe that the same God who gave us our intellect would have us put it aside and not use it."

God gave us brains and he must be more than delighted when we increase our knowledge of the great world he created. But figuring out HOW it happened is not the question of the Christian faith. Science asks how – faith asks WHY.

Why and what for. What difference does it make WHO created all this and us?

Well if the answer to WHY did God create the heavens and the earth is out of love, then it makes a huge difference. Because to be created in love is to be created in and for relationship. Remember last week – the importance of God the FATHER being the relationship he establishes with us.

To be created by God in love means that we belong first to him. Our identity as beloved children of God is the identity and relationship which defines all other relationships, making them secondary.

We belong to God – our lives are not our own. We depend on God for our breath and our brains, for our toes and our talents. To live with this awareness in the forefront of our minds and hearts will change the way we live. If everything we are is God-given, then so is everything we do and everything we get and have. And if all this belongs to God, then we are merely stewards of God's world and all that is in it.

We know that we are NOT the center of the universe – but that God is. This is what makes Christians generous and self-less. Haitians have an answer to the question, “Why does God allow misery?” It's a proverb – “God gives, but God doesn't share.” Meaning that God gives us humans everything we need to flourish, but he's not the one who's supposed to divvy up the loot.

And this is most evident when we share the Lord's Supper – a gift from God intended for sharing.

We've traveled a long way from “In the beginning....” And that's as it should be when we believe in God, Creator of heaven and earth.

Let's stand and declare the faith of the church:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord:
who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell.
on the third day he arose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven, and is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the
forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

And that, my friends is what Christians get to believe!