

## *Creating Presence*

Emily Gordon

Children, Families, and Outreach Ministry Coordinator

Bloor Street United Church

Trinity Sunday – June 19, 2011

---

### ***Text: Genesis 1:1-2:4a***

*Our first reading today is the story at the very beginning of Genesis, Genesis 1:1-2:4a. This is the first of two different stories of creation told in the Bible.*

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, 'Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.' And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

And God said, 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.' And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the

darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.' So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.' And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.' And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, 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.'

So God created humankind in his image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

## Matthew 28:16-20

*Today the gospel reading is from Matthew 28:16-20. Jesus has already been crucified and resurrected. Today's reading is of the very last verses of this gospel.*

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

---

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God – Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Creator. It's a name we use pretty frequently. You'll notice it in the Prayer of Jesus later on in the service, which we've been singing since Easter. But what does it mean to think about God as Creator?

Let's start with artistic creation. A writer is faced with nothing – a blank page, which becomes something – a poem, character, story... You will hear artists in a multitude of media, when asked about their inspiration, reply "It just came to me," or "it was just there." From nothing, something is created. Or rather, creation comes from oneself. I've recently been watching the show Top Chef (I know, high quality programming), and I noticed when a contestant said that cooking is the way he expresses himself. In fact, it's a recurring theme on the show: the way a chef appears in her food. It becomes something deeply personal – the different techniques he uses, her choice of ingredients and spices. In a sense, the food they create, is them "on a plate". They are in the food, their presence. Many writers, actors, architects, and other artists of all kinds, talk about being present in what they create. And what they create is a defining part of who they are.

So what does it mean to think about God as Creator? If creation is an act that puts yourself into what you create, then thinking of God as Creator means we need to think about God in creation. The world is not something separate created by God and then left to run on its own. God is not impersonal or distant, does not watch everything and

then maybe decide to intervene once in a while. Actually the artist metaphor falls short, because even when we talk about the artist present in her art, the two are separate. A sculptor sells his sculpture. A musician sets aside her instrument. But God does not have these human limitations. God is too big. So in a way, when we talk about God's presence in creation, we should say that this is because all of creation is in God.

What does it mean to think about God as Creator? Let's return to Genesis, which begins, as we read today: "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth." The verb "created" here suggests an action completed in the past, but there is never only one possible translation. We can also read: "In the beginning, when God began to create the heavens and the earth." Notice the difference? Suddenly it is about creation beginning, but not necessarily ending. Later on we hear that on the seventh day God rested – not that God stopped creating, but that God rested from all that work of creating. What happens on the eighth day? Well, maybe the heavens and earth were finished, as Genesis tells us – but finished a bit like a poem by someone like W.H. Auden who would finish, even publish, a poem, then return and revise it years later, recreating the poem. Creation has happened, but it is not final.

God is a creating presence; God is always creating presence.

And, I suspect this is true for all of us, sometimes we find ourselves in a place where what need is, and is only, presence. Grief and suffering can bring us to a place where it doesn't make sense to talk about fixing things, where things can't just be forgotten. I've been in a place like that. One evening I showed up at my friend's house with nothing but grief. She gave me a hug, and made tea. Most importantly, she just stayed with me. She was there. A simple presence can mean everything.

God's presence has the potential to be the most precious gift, but it can be hard to sense. We find ourselves too busy, or too alone. Too overwhelmed with people, or too disconnected from others. This isn't anything new. The psalms are filled with cries of absence. In the Bible, we read stories of disbelief, uncertainty, suffering. Sometimes that's why we come to church, because somehow we've been feeling not quite right, maybe for a few days, or weeks, or months. And then perhaps we realize that we haven't felt the presence of God, the stillness and breath of the church and the smiles and voices of our community here. So we come. And maybe we're still too caught up in our own turmoil, but perhaps we catch a glimpse. Last week, during our unusual Pentecost service, we asked that the Holy Spirit fill the church, fill us to overflowing. And somehow as we moved around the sanctuary from music and stories, to candles and games... something happened... at least for some of us, I think, in an unexpected way, we were reminded of God's presence.

It seems that God's presence is something we need to be reminded of. The Gospel reading today, the final words of Matthew, ends with Jesus saying, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." The way something ends is so often the most important. Top Chef has taught me the importance of dessert, which creates your final impression of the meal. In an essay, the final paragraph brings together all of your thoughts and arguments. In music, the final chord resolves the harmonies, leaving you feeling complete. In Matthew, this final note is the presence of God. Jesus doesn't expect that the disciples would always feel this presence. The final direction is to *remember* that the presence of God is with us always. Not necessarily to experience it, but to remember it.

Genesis and Matthew, together, convey God's presence from the very beginning to the very end. And now we come to another "but" – but what if it's easier not to be aware of God's presence? It's easy to *say* that God is with us. It's like the stereotype of Children's Time – kids quickly learn the "right" answer, either "Jesus", or maybe "God loves us". But, if we really think of God as Creator, a constant creating presence, if we really think that all of the world is in God, a part of God – won't that affect everything we see, won't that change almost everything that we do? God's creating presence makes everything a gift – every scrap of paper, every smile, every moment witnessed, every taste of fresh asparagus or long-frozen mixed vegetables. But how would we survive if we were always in a state of wonder, always realized or remembered that every moment is precious because every moment we are within God's presence?

Over this past week, I've been trying to remember God present everywhere. It's a bit overwhelming. Much easier to walk along the street thinking about emails or what groceries to buy or whether my first sermon will be far too long. Easier. But... Monday evening I was walking home and suddenly I heard the wind in the trees. The leaves rustled together, audible over the other sounds. I looked up and realized it is almost summer, and the leaves are really here, a vibrant living green. The wind moving through them made them ripple – maybe just a little like God's spirit moving over the waters at the beginning of creation. For a moment, I was aware of a presence.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning writes:

*Earth's crammed with heaven  
And every common bush alive with God.  
Only he who sees takes off his shoes;  
the rest sit around and pluck blackberries.*

I think remembering God's creating presence may mean living with passion and compassion rather than complacency. Today we hear Jesus say to "make disciples." The word disciple comes from the word for learner. Jesus does not demand certainty and unshakable beliefs, but commitment and a willingness to learn. The story of Genesis is one where God gives us an enormous gift – a gift of the entire world (every person, every blackberry...). Think about it this way: God gave us, and continues to give us, a gift of so much to learn and to discover – more than we possibly ever could. We are created to a state of learning, and to help make learners, loving to seek God's presence.

So what does it really mean to think of God as Creator? Maybe it means that, whether or not we are aware of it (or want to be aware of it), God is continually creating presence within this creation, which is itself within God. We are created, being created, and called to join in the act of creation. A big task. But remember that we are not alone, God is with us always. Thanks be to God. Amen.

---