

1st Sunday after Pentecost – Holy Trinity
June 11, 2017

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Mount Olive Lutheran Church

Theme: From very good to very bad... and back again.
Text: **Genesis 1:1 – 2:3**

- 1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
- ³ And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.
- ⁶ And God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.” ⁷ So God made the expanse and separated the water under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. ⁸ God called the expanse “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.
- ⁹ And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.
- ¹¹ Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. ¹² The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.
- ¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. ¹⁷ God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.
- ²⁰ And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” ²¹ So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” ²³ And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.
- ²⁴ And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

27 So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

29 Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. **30** And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

2 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. **3** And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

The Word of God we will focus on today is our 1st Lesson from Genesis. Let’s start with prayer.

Triune God, oh be our stay And let us perish never! Cleanse us from our sins, we pray, And grant us life forever. Amen. (CW hymn 192a)

This past Wednesday the Capital Times in Madison reported on a hearing in which Wisconsin State Representative Jesse Kramer stated his belief that the earth was 6,000 years old – something he claimed as an article of faith. Also on Wednesday the New York Times reported on a scientific discovery of fossils found in Morocco that date back about 300,000 years according to scientists, supposedly indicating that man evolved much earlier than had been previously assumed. As you can imagine Jesse Kramer was widely mocked for his belief about a young earth that flew in the face of what is considered a scientific fact – that the earth is over 4 billion years old and that man, and indeed all life, has been evolving for hundreds of thousands – even millions of years.

Now... we could spend hours, days, weeks discussing the science behind evolutionary theory, the difference between micro and macro evolution, or discussing the assumptions and problems that are found when using thermoluminescence or radiocarbon dating... and if we wanted to we could poke holes in these so called scientific “facts” and raise other questions that cannot be answered by science about where everything came from... and I’d be happy to have those discussions with anyone who wanted to have them. But today we are simply going to do one

thing that for us as Christians is most important: we are going to listen to what God tells us about who we are, where we came from, and why we are here. Because God is not silent when it comes to such questions. He has left behind witnesses for us.

The created world, for example, speaks to the fact it has a Creator. The Bible tells us: **The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. (Psalm 19:1).** We look into the sky and look around this world and see evidence of careful and intelligent design. And we can't argue with God when he says: **since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. (Romans 1:20).**

What's more, God has placed his law inside of us so that even if we were blind to the witness of the world around us, we would still know that there is a higher power to whom we are accountable. God tells us that when people who do not have the law as revealed in the Bible still do the things required by God's law, God says: **they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them. (Romans 2:15).**

My point is simply this: The Bible is clear that God has given sufficient testimony even apart from his Word so that all people know deep down there is a higher power of some kind... someone who brought order to the universe and someone who will hold them accountable for what they do. But simply knowing there is a god of some kind is not enough. It doesn't answer the questions of who he is, how he brought all things into being, and what his relationship is with us. Those things can only be known if God tells us. And he does. The Bible gives us God's own record of things that we simply could not know if he had not revealed it. And that record starts, unsurprisingly, at the beginning of creation.

Now, we don't have time today to go into depth on every detail of the account of creation. But even a quick glance at this opening prologue to the Bible tells us a few key things about who God is, how and why he brought our universe into existence, and what our relationship is – or was meant to be – with him.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (1:1) The very first thing God reveals to us about himself is that he existed before our world began. He is eternal. He did not need anything or anyone else. And yet he chose to create all things and make known his wisdom, power, and love to his creation. We see his wisdom in the orderly way he created the universe. He began with the basics and built up the world into a place where man could not only survive, but thrive. He demonstrated his unlimited power as he simply spoke and called things into existence out of nothing. And in love he created all things in perfection. Nothing was out of place in the beginning. And all was meant to bring joy to his creatures, mankind most of all.

And besides these characteristics of God, we notice another thing about God in this opening section of Scripture. He is one God... and yet... he also has distinct Persons in his God-head. The teaching of the Bible which we are focusing on today, that God is three distinct persons in one God, is something we see already in the beginning. We cannot explain it, we simply observe it and marvel at it.

Very often Christians attribute different acts to the different Persons of the Trinity. The Father is the Creator, the Son the Redeemer, the Spirit is the Sanctifier – the one who brings us to faith. And yet what we witness here in Genesis and elsewhere in Scripture is that each Person of the God-head is active in everything God is doing. In creation, for example, we are told that all three Persons were active. Scripture says: **Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? (Malachi 2:10)**. Also St. Paul, speaking about Jesus, the Son of God, says: **By him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth. (Colossians 1:16)**. And our sermon text itself points to the work of the Spirit in creation, telling us how: **the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters (1:2)** as he created and protected his new world.

And we see this mystery at work – our single God in three Persons – in the most amazing way as he creates man. After filling the world with all man would need for his life and enjoyment: **Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (1:26-27)**.

God’s perfect creation was crowned with a perfect creature who was created in God’s own image. Adam and Eve were holy like God. They loved perfectly like God. They were fully in tune with God’s will. And that is what God intended to be the case forever. He made them to know him and live in perfect harmony and fellowship with him. He made them so they could know his love and glorify him by reflecting that love. And when we get to the end of the creation account we see what...? **God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. (1:31)**

So what happened...? Because what was once perfect, “very good” as God himself described it... is now very bad... the world and those who live in it are corrupted. The earth is polluted and decaying... animals and man don’t live in harmony... And mankind itself is at war... nation against nation, religion against religion, family against family... war, disagreement, hatred, acts of selfishness pervade our very being. We see sickness, sadness, savagery, and death all around us... what we see is the opposite of very good... so again the question is, “What happened?”

Well, for Christians, while it’s sad, this question is not difficult to answer. Sin happened. Disobedience happened. What God created in perfection, we corrupted. And despite the fallen angel Satan’s role in our fall into sin we are the ones to blame. Adam and Eve chose to disobey. They were the whole human race and they brought the whole human race into judgment. And following their fall every child born from their line was born not in God’s image, but in the image of sinful man. They had lost not only a perfect creation, but the perfect relationship they had known with their God. We don’t have to look hard in our own lives to see this sinful nature act out as we doubt and disobey God’s Word... as we take the things he intended for our good and twist them to evil purposes in our lives, just as our parents, and their parents before them have done – going all the way back to the beginning.

And yet, despite us being very bad, this world now being very bad, God remained very good. So good in fact that he did not abandon his lost creation and lost creatures, but chose in love to bring them back again to the status of “very good” that they had lost.

Have you ever heard the story of the little boy and his sailboat? There was a boy who built a toy sailboat. He spent countless hours carefully fashioning it and pouring over every detail. This little boat was his pride and joy. And when he had finished it he decided he was going to take it down to the river near his farmhouse and play with it. Well... sadly, a gust of wind came along as he was playing and swept his sailboat away down the river. It was lost.

A few days later though, this boy found himself going into town with his father. And as he walked past the window of a second hand store, he saw his boat! The boy rushed inside and found the shopkeeper and told him that the boat was his. But the shopkeeper explained that he had no way of knowing that, and anyways he had paid someone good money for that sailboat. If the boy wanted it, he was going to have to pay for it.

And so that's what the boy did. He did odd jobs, saved up his allowance, and pretty soon had enough money to get his boat back. And after paying the shopkeeper the little boy held up his prize... and with a smile on his face and joy in his heart he said to the sailboat: "You are mine twice – for I created you, and now I have bought you back."

How God must have felt over his lost creation, and especially lost mankind, is something difficult for us to comprehend. The love, the care, the detail he put into our creation... the purpose he gave us... the joy he found in being with us... all to have it lost. What great pain our God must have felt. And yet what is more amazing still is that knowing all this, our God willingly planned and carried out a rescue operation... he paid the ultimate price... the price needed to buy back what had been lost. Sin had to be punished and so God took on flesh... the Creator became one with his creation so that he could take the punishment for us.

But not just to remove their sin... Jesus died for the lost people he had created so that he could recreate them in his image once again. And that's just what he's done with you and me... As the Spirit of God hovered over the waters of our baptism and bestowed the blessing of the Triune God upon us... washing away the sin which stained our hearts, and restoring in us the image of our Creator. This is what the Lord continues to do for us as the love of the Father is announced to us again and again in the living and enduring Word of God... and as the peace of forgiveness is fed to us in the Lord's Supper.

What was very bad, us and our future prospects, God has made very good again through the salvation he carried out for us. And the day will come, God says, when even **the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Romans 8:21)**. We long for that day when the heavens and earth will be remade in permanent perfect, and we will be given the home of righteousness (**2 Peter 3:13**) where we will live in harmony and fellowship once again with our Triune God and offer him perfect praise as we enjoy his love and blessing forever. Amen.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. (2 Corinthians 13:14).