

In the Beginning  
Genesis 1:1-19  
Genesis 1:20-2:3  
John 1:1-5

Westminster Presbyterian Church  
Rev. Doug Browne  
September 10, 2017

### Genesis 1:1-19

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.

### Genesis 1:20-2:3

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.

### John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

If you are telling someone how your day went, the story has a beginning, when you got up, or when the story started to get interesting. The story has a middle, when the important things happened that you are telling them about. And the story has an end, when you make your point, or you say, “Can you believe that?”

If you tell a person’s life story, you start with where and when they were born. What circumstances attended this event? You proceed to the middle, which is most of their life. And, if the story is over, you tell the story of the end, of where and when and how they died.

The story of the universe is no different.

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the Word was with God and the Word was God. The earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the waters. A wind from God swept over the face of the water.

The God said, “Let there be light!” and, “Bang!” there was light.<sup>1</sup> And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

You may have grown up hearing that line as “the darkness comprehended it not.”<sup>2</sup> Don’t worry, nobody’s trying to change your Bible. The translation we are using uses a different word because the English language has changed since the King James Bible was translated. When the King James Bible was published in 1611, the word, “comprehend” in English could mean to understand something, but the word’s primary meaning was to seize something, to capture it, to overcome it.<sup>3</sup> We modern English-speakers don’t use the word, “comprehend,” to mean that any more. So the translators of the New Revised Standard Bible, the translation that we use in the pews here, chose a different word to get that idea across.<sup>4</sup>

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. And there was evening, and there was morning, the first day.

And God made the sky and separated the waters on the Earth from what was out there in space. 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 continents formed, and the waters of the seas flowed into the lower

---

<sup>1</sup> The allusion to the Big Bang is entirely intentional.

<sup>2</sup> John 1:5, King James Version.

<sup>3</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, “Comprehend,” p. 741.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that this is not the only place in the Bible where similar things happen.

areas of the globe. God saw that it was good. Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation.” The Earth brought forth plants of all kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky,” and it was so. God made the Sun and the Moon, and God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

God said, “Let there be animals in the sea and birds in the air,” and it was so. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, telling them to be fruitful and multiply. And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

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. And God said that it was good.

God then said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.” And God created humankind in God’s image, male and female. God blessed them, telling them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and master it. Subdue the fish and the birds and everything that moves on the earth.”

“God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.”

And on the seventh day God rested. We keep the seventh day holy ever since, because God rested on that day.

So that’s the beginning of the story.

This is the beginning of the story of God and God's people. The story of which each of us is a part.

Over the millennia since this story was first told, a lot of things have been read into the beginning of the story, things that are not there.

The Bible does not say that Creation happened in six literal days in a row. It may have. Or those six named days may have been spread out over thousands, even millions of years. The Bible does not say, and there were no human beings around to witness it until Day Six.

The Bible does not say how things were created. That's kind of God's department, and not nearly as important as what the Bible does say. The Bible says who created the universe. We do not have to choose between scientific theories and believing that God created the universe. Properly understood, science and the Bible are asking and answering different questions. Science theorizes as to how the universe came to be. The Scriptures say who made that happen.

The Bible does not say that the Earth was ever perfect, without any minute flaw or anything that God would wish to be different. Did you notice that? God sees that Creation, in its totality, is very good. Very good is not perfect.

I hope that this takes a little pressure off us – the cosmos was never perfect. We don't have to be perfect, and we do not have to make the world around us perfect. That's good, because we're not going to manage that.

The Bible does not say that God gave human beings unlimited rulership over the world, with no accountability. Human beings are told to subdue the earth, and to have dominion over everything that lives in the sea and the air and the earth.

But that dominion is not unlimited.

Human beings were told to subdue the earth, to bring it into compliance with God's laws. Not our wills. God's laws. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that human beings are free to damage God's earth, or to exploit it with no reckoning. Power without accountability is un-Biblical and un-Godly.

Jesus once likened the earth to a vineyard.

“A man planted a vineyard.

“He fenced it, dug a winepress, erected a watchtower, turned it over to the farmhands, and went off on a trip. At the time for harvest, he sent a servant back to the farmhands to collect his share of the harvest.”<sup>5</sup>

We are the farmhands here. We did not create the vineyard. We are stewards, or even sharecroppers, for the one who did. We do not have unlimited leeway to do what we want with what God created and entrusted to us. We are supposed to take care of what God created, and we are accountable to the Creator for what we have done with it.

Even when our lives seem very good to us, we have enough sense not to rip out the walls of hotel rooms,<sup>6</sup> but we do the equivalent in the world. We seem to keep forgetting this basic idea of who rightfully owns all that there is, including us.

There are some things in that story that are important, things we ought to pay attention to.

---

<sup>5</sup> Mark 12:1-2, *The Message*.

<sup>6</sup> Joe Walsh, “Life’s Been Good to Me,” Soundtrack to the 1978 film *FM*.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness could not overcome it. That is not me being sloppy with tenses. I went back to the original languages. The light shines, present tense.

God created the cosmos, but God did not then go away and ignore it for thousands of years. God created the cosmos, and then stayed involved. This Fall, we will be talking about some of the ways in which God continued to create and to refine the world thousands of years ago, and how God continues to do that today.

In Jesus' story of the vineyard, the landowner sends multiple servants to the farmhands, to pick up the landowner's share of the harvest.<sup>7</sup>

God sent many prophets to God's people, to point out to them that they were stewards and not owners, and to show them God's will for them. We will be hearing from many of them this Fall and early Winter: people like Amos, and Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

In the vineyard story, the landowner sends his beloved son to the farmhands. The farmhands kill him and throw the body over the fence.<sup>8</sup>

John explains that the Word of God, the one through whom God created all things, came into the world. He was a man named Jesus, who lived and died for us, and God raised him again from the dead.

So, we have heard the beginning of the Story, the story that tells us who we are as Christians, and as human beings. We are God's beloved creations, living in God's cosmos. God is not an absentee landlord, building the world and then ignoring it. God continues to create and to refine. Continues to create and to refine both the world, and us.

---

<sup>7</sup> Mark 12:2-5.

<sup>8</sup> Mark 12:6-8.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.