

Creation

Genesis 1:1 - 2:4

Revelation 21:1-5

April 22, 2018

It would have been easier to do nothing.

It would have been easier if God made nothing: no heavens, no earth, no universe, no us. If God made nothing, no thing, if there were no human beings, no human history, God would surely be spared so much anguish, so much heartbreak, so much bitter disappointment. God would be spared the sight of us making a mess, such a terrible mess, of this earth and of ourselves: poisoning air and oceans, soil and streams; killing off hundreds of species of animals and plants; killing each other, wantonly and without remorse; putting our own future and the future of the planet itself in jeopardy.

It would have been easier if God made nothing. God doesn't need us. We do not have to be. The universe does not have to be. And yet, here we are. Why? Why are we here? Why is there something rather than nothing?

It would be easier for any of us never to have children. We would be spared much trouble and worry and heartache. And yet we do. We do because we find delight in our children, not for what they can do for us, but for what they are in themselves. We find delight in giving them life and doing what we can to make their lives good.

And the same is true of God. Why are we here? Why is there something rather than nothing? The opening sentences of Genesis say it is because of God. All that is is because of God ... because of God's intent, God's purpose, God's desire, all for the sake of God's delight, God's delight in bringing a universe to life and making it good: "And God saw all that he had made and it was very good."

It was good! This, this is good, all of this ...

Bluebells and trillium, lady's-slippers and wild roses, flowing waters crystal clear, clouds that sail across the sky, the song of the hermit thrush, the coot of the osprey, the wingspan of a great blue heron, the glide of an eagle.

Mountains jagged and steep, hills wooded and smooth, fields of corn and apple orchards, prairie grasses and prairie dogs that burrow under the grasses.

Oceans restless and vast and full of mystery, tiny streams home to ferns and watercress and trout, fierce wolves and grazing sheep, steamy mangrove swamps and frozen arctic tundra, hot sun, cold moon, exploding nebula, enigmatic black hole.

It is good, all of this, all that we can see and all that we have not yet seen and all that we may never see, because it's not just for us. All of this is not just for us, but to bring God delight.

It is good! This, this universe of God's making, is good. It is there, by God's will, at the beginning of the story, and it is there, by God's will, at story's end. All of time, all of history, moves from creation toward ... creation, toward the renewal of all that is, toward the day when God will make all things new, when there will be a new heaven and a new earth -- a new earth, a renewed earth, an earth made new.

Our story, from beginning to end, is all about here, all about being here. We belong here. We belong where God put us, where God made us to be. We cannot understand ourselves apart from being here, because we too are created. We are made of the same stuff as the rest of creation. Apart from creation, we simply do not exist.

This is our life and this is our hope: to be here, to live here in a world that God has made good and will make good. Our hope is not that one day we will go to God. Our hope is in the God who comes to us.

It is good! This is good.

Why does it matter? Why does it matter that you hear and believe that this is good? Because this matters. Because matter matters. Because creation matters. Because we need to be reminded, we need to remember, that this matters.

Because so much of religious tradition, so much of our own Christian tradition, has become about fleeing, about fleeing this life, about fleeing this earth, about fleeing this body, about fleeing from trouble and struggle and vulnerability and risk. But if God had been unwilling to accept trouble and struggle and vulnerability and risk, we would not be.

When our faith is about fleeing, when our hope is about getting away, it is simply not Christian any more. We have forgotten our story. We don't know God and our faith becomes worse than useless. Worse than useless because at best we ignore what God cares about most and at worst we actively work against God's purposes.

When we dream about "heaven," we ignore the earth. We think: "Why worry about what is only passing away? This is not our home. Our real life is somewhere else. Taking care of the earth is not a spiritual priority."

But this is our home. This is where we belong. This is what God cares about. This is what God calls good. Taking care of the earth is a top priority if we mean what we say when we pray, "Thy will be done on earth."

When our faith becomes focussed on "spiritual" matters, on getting our hearts right with God and no more, we ignore our bodies. Tell me, why did Jesus heal sick people? Because bodies matter! Why did Jesus feed hungry people? Because bodies matter! Why was Jesus raised bodily from death? Because bodies matter! Why is the gathered community of followers of Jesus called the body of Christ? Because bodies matter!

Bodies matter. Taking care of bodies matters, our own bodies and our neighbors' bodies. Our work is an extension of Jesus' work, doing all we can to heal the brokenness of people's lives in this world -- broken bodies, broken relationships, broken community.

And when we are convinced our purpose is to save souls, and no more, we ignore politics and economics and commerce and science and medicine and art, because we believe none of that really matters or matters only in a peripheral way, having little or nothing to do with the destiny of our souls.

Will you show me your soul? I will show you my soul! Here it is ...

Soul. It's ψυχή (psyche) in Greek, נֶפֶשׁ (nephesh) in Hebrew. It means breath, life, an animated body. You have no soul, you have no life, apart from what you see, apart from what you are, apart from your body. You are you, as you seem to be, not some immortal, immaterial something plopped down into a random body, but a unique constellation of chemicals and minerals and genes animated by the breath of God. This is your life, this is you, and it is in your life as it is, as you seem, that you reflect God's glory. This ... is good!

This is good! This body, this earth, this creation. So love it! Take care of it!

Care about drinking water contaminated by mountain top removal mining in West Virginia. Care about bleached corals on the Great Barrier Reef. Care about the degradation of the Amazon rainforest. Care about climate change. Care and do!

Care about multiple sclerosis. Care about lung cancer. Care about mental illness. Care about Parkinson's disease. Care and do!

Care about poverty and the entrenched inequities that cause it and exacerbate it. Care about hungry Sudanese. Care about displaced Syrians. Care about women harassed and abused. Care about the racism, overt and covert, that still plagues this nation and belies our founding purpose. Care and do!

To believe is to care, and to care is to do. To believe that creation matters because God calls it good is to care about it, all of it, and to care is to do.

What did Jesus do? Not what would Jesus do, but what did Jesus do? He healed, he fed, he forgave, he welcomed, he affirmed humble ones and challenged proud ones. He prayed and taught us to pray: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth." And he offered himself. He offered himself for our salvation, to save our lives. He offered his body to save our bodies, to make right, to make well, to make whole, our embodied life, the embodied life we share, in this world.

And he said: "If any of you want to come with me, you must forget yourself, carry your cross, and follow me." If we want to follow Jesus, we will offer ourselves as he offered himself. We will not offer to God offerings that cost us nothing ...