

02.11.24

“Creation: Day 6”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Genesis 1:24-31 (NIV)

²⁴ And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the 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 mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
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 in the sea and the birds in the sky 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 in the sky and all the creatures that move along 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.

Leader: These are the Words of God for the People of God!

All: Thanks be to God!

John 2:23-25 (NLT)

Jesus and Nicodemus

²³ Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration, many began to trust in him. ²⁴ But Jesus didn’t trust them, because he knew all about people. ²⁵ No one needed to tell him about human nature, for he knew what was in each person’s heart.

Leader: These Words Are of God. All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Creator God, we thank you for this day of Bible Study, worship, and fellowship. The music, imagery, and Scripture inspire us. May we find beauty in all we experience today as we are drawn closer to you and each other. Help us to understand your Word and apply it to our ministries and personal lives. May this message continue our journey into growth and beauty. Speak to us this morning in your Words and your voice through this servant messenger. Amen.

Happy almost Valentine's Day! The topic of love will be next week's message because of our snow day, so we'll continue the creation story, and remind you that Lent begins on this Ash Wednesday too. It's rare we have both Valentine's Day and Ash Wednesday on the same day! So, I've handed out a new daily devotional booklet for this Lenten season. I particularly liked the name: *The Sanctuary for Lent 2024*. So, as you add this to your daily spiritual ritual, please think of these messages as your own little sanctuary where you are present with God as you read and pray. It follows lectionary readings. I hope it is a helpful and fulfilling journey to the cross of Good Friday and the resurrection of Easter Sunday. On a more secular note, it's also Super Bowl Day! Like Debbie said, please bring extra non-perishable food items in for the other Souper Bowl collection for our ACCA food pantry and neighbors.

Over the last two weeks, we saw the heavens, seas and earth created; the stars, sun, and moon last week, the natural laws of the seasons, both night and day, and on Day 5, birds of the air and creatures of the sea. Day 6 might be called God's climax or crescendo, in musical terms, as he created man in the image of God (verse 27). *Imago Dei*, the image of God can be confusing because we all know that God is not human in form. Only Christ is the divine man come to earth. What *Imago Dei* refers to is the **essence of God**, reflected in humankind according to this passage. Genesis is describing humankind as having life, breath, beauty, truth, wisdom, holiness, justice, and love—all characteristics of God the Creator. Because of these attributes, which both have, humans can share with him and be in relationship with God.

This has long been a challenge in history. The ancient world adapted the mystical concept of endowing little god sculptures, for example, with the powers and attributes of their gods, misunderstanding and worshipping idols: false and pretentious gods with a little “g.” The idol’s image was thought to be the source of the power of the god they worshipped. This confusion led the Israelites down many wrong paths trying to find the ineffable one God, Yahweh, Elohim. Modern thinkers also diverge from Scripture to interpret humankind to be mirror images of God, or mini gods, which has led to cult religions and new age beliefs, like Ernest Holmes’ Science of Mind, or L. Ron Hubbard’s Scientology, and many others. These view humans as superhuman demi-gods able to change their destinies. This is why Biblical literacy is so important to our student generations. Hollywood’s superhero images distort reality and faith.

Church fathers, however, believed this image of God existed not in the visual facial or bodily image, but in the human being’s common functionality as steward of nature and creation, as well as creator of future humankind. The function of both male and female as created beings was to rule over God’s creation as stewards or managers and to be fruitful and multiply, establishing the human race in all its diversity. All went well until the proverbial “fall” into sin, which is for another day. Until then, God instructed his created humans to eat of the fruits and vegetables but not of any flesh. Of course, that later changed with Noah and the new world after the flood.

According to Biblical scholars, God’s created animals fall into three categories: domestic animals like cattle and horses—both herbivores;

creeping things like reptiles, insects, and small quadrupeds; and “beasts” like wolves, bears, and wild animals—carnivores. Again, the words say to subdue them, but most scholars agree it means to **steward** them, not necessarily control their presence or breeding. The environment (rivers, grasses, forests, and wildlife) improved when the wolves were brought back into Yellowstone, because the ecosystem thrived on the natural laws of predation and survival. Eco-theology or environmental theology has evolved since the early 1970’s to study and make sense of creation and climate change. The Genesis account is an important factor as we try to understand how science and humanity align with God’s desires for how we are to live and protect our planet. Remember the blue skies that occurred naturally during the pandemic because people stayed home and did not drive vehicles? Unfortunately, today, pollution levels have increased again. Are we being good stewards of the created world? For those of you who like poetry, I encourage you, in honor of Black History Month, to look up James Weldon Johnson, who wrote “The Creation” in 1927, as part of his work called *God's Trombones*, the last section of it follows:

Up from the bed of the river
 God scooped the clay;
 And by the bank of the river
 He kneeled him down;
 And there the great God Almighty
 Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
 Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,
 Who rounded the earth in the middle of his hand;
 This great God,
 Like a mammy bending over her baby,
 Kneeled down in the dust
 Toiling over a lump of clay
 Till he shaped it in is his own image;

Then into it he blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.
Amen. Amen.

Of course, our transition between God's creation of humankind and our second passage is the incarnation itself, Jesus, whose birth we just celebrated. He was God in the flesh, yet we crucified his body. Our beliefs, hindsight, and witness of the empty tomb agree that God is greater than any human; he was raised again on that third day, which we will celebrate at the end of the March.

To understand the second short passage, we must think for a moment about the context. Jesus had just called his first disciples; he has also returned from a wedding at Cana where he turned water into wine and where his mother tried to persuade him, although prematurely, to reveal his divine power and he refused. He had recently challenged the temple authorities saying that he could rebuild the temple in three days (and they didn't realize the temple was his body!). He angrily overturned the tables in that synagogue because of his disappointment with human greed and sin; and now, he summarizes his feelings. All this happened quickly, as he began to realize the human frailties and flaws in those he was trying to teach and save.

Jesus knew the wickedness of some and the weakness of others. The writer reminds the reader that Jesus was divine, and understood human nature, warts, and all. God made all and was present when humans sinned and separated from him. Mostly, Christ was a patient teacher and encourager, but in John 2:23-25, we see the humanity of discouragement yet also acceptance. He realizes his father's created humans have free

will, and in his short life he knows the ambitions, deceit, and jealousy in people's hearts. Remember, he had been tempted by Satan in the desert before this statement was made. John's gospel is not an eyewitness account, but a spiritual reflection on the life of Jesus. Remember John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." He was there from the very beginning! He saw it all. As you ponder these words this week, let us also remember that we love because he first loved us. That *agape* love and all the other forms, *eros*, *phileo*, and *storge*, are expressions of love most of us will acknowledge this week. God's love is best of all, or we would not exist. Think on these things! Find beauty in those expressions, and we'll speak more of them next week. Amen! ||

Let us pray.

Creator God, we thank you for creating the universe, sky, water, earth, vegetation, animals, and humankind. We especially thank you for your son, Jesus, who helps us to understand disappointment and love. Be with us this week as we ponder these six days and rest on the seventh, our Sabbath. Please clarify these messages in our minds and words, so that we can help others ponder your greatness. Open the eyes of our hearts, dear Lord, we pray, **Amen.**