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For the next 66 weeks or about 15 months, we are going to walk through the Bible in worship. The word Bible comes from the Greek word *biblia* meaning books. Each week the theme for worship will come from a different book of the Bible beginning today with Genesis and ending with Revelation in the fall of 2007. My hope is that by journeying together through all the books of the Bible we will not only learn a great deal about living faithfully and obediently to the Lord, but that our knowledge, understanding and appreciation for the scriptures with all of their diversity, wisdom, and challenging passages will increase.

We are going to proceed in the order the books appear in the Bible so worship in July will focus on key themes from the first five books of what Christians call the Old Testament. These books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are known by several terms including: the “Five Books of Moses,” and the Pentateuch, a Greek term referring to a work divided into five scrolls. In Jewish circles these five books are called by the Hebrew word Torah, a term frequently translated “law.” In a larger sense the Hebrew word *torah* refers to the “teaching” or “revelation” that God gives the people.

The Pentateuch or Torah is written in the form of a narrative extending from the creation of the universe to the eve of Israel’s entrance into “the promised land.” As we move through the Bible perhaps you’d like to consider reading each book of the Bible the week after it is used in worship on Sunday. So this week you would read Genesis seeking to finish before you come to worship next Sunday. One of the difficulties for us each week will be selecting just one passage to preach on, so we will try to include several key scriptures from each book as we did this morning so we at least hear them read. Today I am going to focus on the story of creation from Genesis 1.

It is impossible in 15 or 20 minutes to even do the briefest sketch about creation so let’s just acknowledge that up front. There continues to be debate about creation among those who advocate for the theories of evolution, scientific creationism, intelligent design, string theory or something else however, the most basic question of all has always been and probably always will be, **“Why is there something and not nothing?”**

Throughout the Bible the writers of the scriptures see in the beauty, order, structure and mystery of the natural world the artistic, creative, and powerful work of a

Creator. Rather than worshipping nature itself or merely seeing it as something to be exploited, the Bible reveals that creation is the handiwork of God who is the Creator. Psalm 8:3-4 displays this sense of wonder at all that God has made and humility at our small and yet significant place in creation: *“When I look at the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?”* I believe that the earth and the universe were designed by a Creator God and that they are not the result of random chance or the absolutely perfect coming together of elements and materials that came from somewhere.

The first chapters of Genesis, which means “origin,” are frequently cited in arguments about how the world got here and how long it took to appear. Genesis seems to be generally correct in its view of life beginning with light and darkness, life being dependent upon light and water, the development of plants, and then simpler animals ending with humans who are the most complex, however, I don’t think Genesis 1 was written so much to be a scientific, step by step description of the creation of the world. Sometimes we may try to make the Bible into something it was perhaps not intended to be. The Bible is a book about spirituality, about faith in and a relationship with the Creator of the universe.

Scientifically, we know far more about the vastness and complexity of the universe than the ancient Israelites who could express poetically their wonder at the sun, moon, and stars but who could not imagine knowing the speed of light (186,000 miles a second), setting foot on the moon, or the size of our Milky Way galaxy. To grasp the vastness of the distance across our galaxy you need to remember that *in one second* light can travel back and forth across the United States *62 times*. The moon is 1.3 light seconds away from earth (240,000 miles), the sun 8.3 light minutes (93 million miles). Light can travel six trillion miles in one year and the Milky Way is a system of about 400 billion stars that is some *90 to 100 thousand light years* in diameter. Our ancient ancestors also didn’t know about quantum physics or the vastness of the microscopic universe of atoms, electrons, and protons. While this is a sermon and not a science class it is interesting to realize that the more we learn about the complexity and vastness of the universe the more we are discovering there is order, structure, interconnectedness and relationships that make it hard for me to believe that chance is an acceptable explanation for the world we know today. The more we learn the less likely it seems that it all just happened. Noted physicist and writer Paul Davies in writing about the critical

contingencies without which life would not be possible states: “It is hard to resist the impression that the present structure of the universe, apparently so sensitive to minor alterations in the numbers, has been rather carefully thought out...Perhaps future developments in science will lead to more direct evidence for other universes, but until then, the seemingly miraculous occurrence of numerical values that nature has assigned to her fundamental constants must remain the most compelling evidence of an element of cosmic design.”¹

Turning back to Genesis, the higher purpose of the story of creation is not to answer the question how, but the question why. Genesis as a book is more concerned with **Why** we are here, than **How** we got here. It is more about God's *intent* than God's *technique* in creation.

The story of creation in Genesis 1 is expressed in the poetic language of worship and prayer. It is a creation hymn. We shared that chapter in its entirety so we could hear the rhythmic, symmetrical structure of its poetic language.

If you look in your Bible you see the pattern:

COMMAND: “*And God said, ‘Let there be...’*”

IMPLEMENTATION: “*And it was so.*”

ASSESSMENT: “*God saw that it was good.*”

TIME: “*And there was evening and there was morning, a day.*”

This is why for our Jewish brothers and sisters day begins at sunset and not with sun rise. One of the simplest of all human observations is that night and day occur in regular sequence and that light seems to be an almost indispensable necessity for life and growth. Who caused this to be so? Genesis' answer is God did. Not only are there waters here below which form seas and oceans, lakes and rivers, and even underground springs, but there are also waters above which provide rain. Who caused this to be so? God. The distribution of the various bodies of water and land masses – God. All the vegetation – grass, herbs, and trees – God. The whole book of Genesis is a drama in which God is always taking the initiative. God and God's creation are bound in a relationship that is assured yet at the same time delicate and precarious. This relationship between God and God's creation is one of free and gracious commitment and invitation. It is about a relationship with the Creator that is based on complete trust rather than coercion. God's graciousness is directed toward all of creation, not merely individual persons.

¹ Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 189.

The Bible begins with the affirmation that our universe, our world, and we ourselves are the creation of God. The central assertion of Genesis 1 is that God made all that constitutes the universe in which we live. In the New Testament, Hebrews 11:3 says, *“By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God.”* The writers of the Old Testament don’t try to prove the existence of God. They affirm that God is and the first eleven chapters of Genesis state that God is creative, artistic, and powerful, that creation is good, humanity bears God’s image, that sin exists and that God punishes evil.

Genesis goes on to tell how God has acted in the lives of particular people, especially Abraham and Sarah and their descendents. Genesis 15:5-6 says the Lord brought Abraham *“outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your descendents be.’* There is a fascinating story in today’s Cape Cod Times Forum section about Steve Olson’s book, *Mapping Human History* that traces the history of humanity. *“With the help of a statistician, a computer scientist, and a supercomputer, Olson has calculated just how interconnected the human family tree is. You would have to go back only 2,000 to 5,000 years – and probably on the low side of that range – to find somebody who could count every person alive today as a descendent.”* We are all likely descendents of Abraham and Sarah, Protestants and Catholics, Jews and Muslims, whether Shiite or Sunni – we are all God’s children and if we could trace our roots back far enough we are all related.

As Christians we affirm with Genesis that a Creator creates Creation. God called the world into being to be God’s faithful world. Throughout the entire rest of the Bible we will see that God and God’s creation are bound together in a distinctive and delicate way because God wants to have a faithful relationship with the earth and with humanity in particular. Our identity comes from the fact that we are known, loved, and enjoyed by the one who created us.

If there is a Creator who knows us and cares about how we live that should profoundly impact our lives. This is the point Paul is seeking to make in Acts 14:15-17 when Paul and Barnabas are speaking in the city of Lystra and part of what they say to those worshipping idols is: “We are mortals just like you, and we bring you good news, that you should **turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.** ¹⁶ In past generations he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways; ¹⁷ **yet he has not left himself without a**

witness in doing good—giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy.”

While the writers of the Bible lacked our scientific knowledge of the earth and universe, in some ways they were more connected to the earth and the seasons of the year and the rhythms God built into the earth than we are in the 21st century.

The current issue of National Geographic includes a lead story about how coasts are in crisis from a host of human behaviors. The quality of our air, what we are doing as stewards of the earth is more important now than ever, especially here in a place like Cape Cod where what we put in the ground often ends up in our water. Most of us have heard in the news of the extensive surveillance that is being done by our government and while I didn't realize our technological ability had gotten this good two different people emailed me the transcript of a conversation that was overheard between God and St. Francis about creation:

God: Francis, you know all about gardens and nature; what in the world is going on down there in the U.S.? What happened to the dandelions, violets, thistles and the stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought, and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long-lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honeybees, and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of color by now. All I see are patches of green.

St. Francis: It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. They're called the Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers "weeds" and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

God: Grass? But it is so boring, it's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, bees or birds, only grubs and sod worms. It's temperamental with temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want grass growing there?

St. Francis: Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it has grown a little, they cut it....sometimes two times a week.

God: They cut it? Do they bale it like hay?

St. Francis: Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

God: They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

St. Francis: No sir, just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

God: Now let me get this straight...they fertilize it to make it grow and when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

St. Francis: Yes, sir.

God: These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

St. Francis: You aren't going to believe this Lord, but when the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

God: What nonsense! At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep the moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves become compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life.

St. Francis: You'd better sit down, Lord. As soon as the leaves fall, the Suburbanites rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

God: No way! What do they do to protect the shrubs and tree roots in the winter to keep the soil moist and loose?

St. Francis: After throwing the leaves away, they go out and buy something called mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.

God: And where do they get this mulch?

St. Francis: They cut down the trees and grind them up to make mulch.

God: Enough! I don't want to think about this anymore. Saint Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have you scheduled for us tonight?

St. Catherine: "Dumb and Dumber," Lord. It's a really stupid movie about....

God: Never mind--I think I just heard the whole story from Saint Francis!

It is good to be able to laugh at ourselves but in a larger sense we are charged by the Lord to be good caretakers and stewards of God's creation of which we are a part and not to ruin it with our selfishness and carelessness. In conclusion then looking at Genesis 1, we hope we don't put a misplaced emphasis on *How* creation occurred rather than *Why* creation occurred. There is a purpose to creation. We are not merely a part of an accidental cosmic chemistry experiment. Our purpose involves being in loving, trusting, empowering relationship with the Sovereign Creator of the universe who made us. All human beings regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, language or tribe have dignity and worth. Men and women together in community reflect the image of God. Creation is intended to display the glory of God; to be as John Calvin wrote, "the theatre

of his glory.” Living in a beautiful place like Cape Cod we are blessed to enjoy a particularly fine seat to enjoy the theatre of God’s glory in God’s spectacular creation.

I close with the poetic words of Psalm 19:1-4a which invites us to be looking around to see how without uttering a word the sky, the sun, the moon, and all stars of heaven are praising and glorifying God every day, inviting us to do the same.

“The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims God’s handiwork.

Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out though all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”