

## 09-10-2023 Worship Service

Each year as school is getting underway, we take time to recognize and give thanks for those who teach and give leadership in Christian Education – Sunday school. As in years past we have a litany that we can all participate in together to help us recognize and bless and dedicate to God our teachers and the Bible which, of course, is our foundational resource. So, I'd like to invite the rest of our students to come forward, up here, onto the stage, and the parents of our students to come forward – parents are often our most significant teachers. And anyone else who teaches, you're invited to stand where you are for our reading.

Litany can be found on page 5 of the 9.10.23 Bulletin

### Morning Prayer –

O God, we come before you this morning proclaiming that you are the Divine Creator, the one who is the Maker of every one of us and of all that is, the Love and Light of the world that no fear or darkness can overcome.

We thank you God, for the gift of this day and for the gift of each new morning as we rise from sleep refreshed and rested, prepared to serve you and to offer our gifts as they may be needed. Keep us alert with nudges from your Holy Spirit for opportunities to lend a helping hand, offer a listening ear, give care to someone, or receive a wise word.

God, we bring you our petitions and requests. We ask for your deep comfort to be felt by those who are grieving. We think especially of David and Aileen and their family as they just experienced the service for Zola yesterday. We pray for those who know and love Patty Shelly and who are feeling her loss keenly. In these moments we bring to mind others who we know are grieving and we place them in your love and care...

We pray for those who are healing – in their bodies, their minds or their spirits. God, you are the great healer and so we ask for your Spirit to be present in ways that bring your peace and healing. In these moments we bring to mind those we're concerned about...

We're grateful God for those who teach! On Sunday mornings, on Wednesday evenings, for those who teach by example and those who use words. Grant your wisdom as we watch and listen and learn from one another. God we pray for guidance as we seek out people to give leadership to our youth at mid-week meetings.

We pray for the health and well-being of the earth. This planet is our greatest resource – the life-sustaining gift and responsibility that you've given us. We pray for wisdom and willingness, creativity and action that can help to restore balance in the eco-systems of the earth and the oceans.

Be with us now with your Spirit as we continue to worship you and to learn of you. We pray in the name of your son Jesus. Amen.

### Prayer of Dedication for our Offerings

Prayer – Thank you God, for all good gifts. For beautiful music, for poetry and the arts. Thank you for our bodies that live and move and breathe. Thank you opportunities to give – our money, our time, our effort and our love. May all of our giving please you and bring you joy. Amen.

### Sermon - Back to the Garden

They were naked, but they weren't embarrassed. They were in the garden. They were perfectly matched companions for one another. And they were engaged in a fully trusting relationship with their Creator. All was right with the world.

In the creation story in Genesis 2, we are introduced to a Creator who creates with actions rather than words. The Lord God *formed* the human, built adam from the adamah, the dust, the ground. This is how the Hebrew plays with the words and their meanings. Adam, the human, comes from adamah, the ground. You see, the ground had not produced. There had been no rain, so there were no plants or crops. But the fact that there had been no rain was only part of the problem. There also had been no human – no person to till or tend or care for the ground. In order to fulfill the artwork that God was imagining, both rain and a human were needed. The Lord God formed the human from the topsoil of the fertile land and blew life's breath into his nostrils. This gives the image of a potter forming, molding, pressing, shaping the clay, building a human. We are reading the description of a Creator who deeply loves and is highly invested in what is being built. Everything that the Creator has made up to this point will be dependent on this human taking care of it. And the brilliance of this plan, it seems, is that the human is made out of the same substance that it will care for. God formed a human from the ground, the same ground that depends on the human for its productivity, its health and well-being.

Now, in this Creation story, the ground was already *fertile* before adam was created. The Lord God had planted a garden, a beautiful, lush garden. And although it hadn't rained, there was water from a river. This is the part of the story that explains the beginnings of the great Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. They were given those names thousands of years ago and the names remain, unchanged. The river in this story that's called Pishon is likely referring to the Nile – that name has changed. The Gihon is a bit of a mystery. The only other Biblical reference to water called Gihon is a small fresh water spring found at the base of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Apparently the story-teller wanted to emphasize the notion that life-giving water, indeed, life itself, comes from the house of God, the Jerusalem Temple. So a relatively small fresh water spring was being equated here with the great Nile, Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. This gives us a window into being able to see the way the ancients understood the profound significance of The Temple.

So God took this adam and put it into the Garden so that the human could avad it – that's the Hebrew word and it can mean to farm it, till it, serve, to protect, to guard. The word avad is the

same word used in Psalm 121, “The Lord is your avad, your protector. The Lord will avad you from all evil; God will avad your very life.” So in this Creation story, the human is to avad the earth. Protect it. Serve it. Guard it. And while the human was protecting the earth, it was given permission to eat whatever – anything growing in this lush garden could be eaten. Except for one tree. The fruit of that one tree was the single prohibited item in the entire garden. And in the very next chapter, of course, we see that in spite of all the beauty and bounty and freedom the humans were given, they were inescapably obsessed with what had been forbidden to them.

But for the moment, it seemed like things were gonna be great! The Creator had come up with the earth, had made this beautiful garden, had formed a living, breathing creature out of the earth and now this creature would live with its Creator, serving and protecting the garden, working to bring the best out of the earth. The Creator and the Creature, working, co-creating together.

But there was a problem, of course. The human was alone in the garden and the Lord God could see that that was NOT good. So God set about creating again, in search of the perfect helper for adam. And God was on a roll! Again, from the fertile land God formed all the wild animals, all the birds in the sky, and God brought all of these creatures to the human for naming. And the human, working together with the Creator, gave each one a name. But it wasn’t enough.

Adam needed something more than another creature who was formed from the ground. The adam needed an ezer. Now THIS Hebrew word ezer is difficult to translate because the only other time it’s used in scripture it refers to the divine help that God gives. The animals and the birds were not adequate for adam. What was needed was a creature that was equal, a partner that was mutual, corresponding in creativity and purpose. So the Creator did not build this creature from the ground, but instead, put the first human into a deep sleep and took out a side – not just a rib as it’s usually been translated, but a side, to be made into another human. One who would be a helper, yes, but an ezer, a correlating co-creator with the first human and with God. “They are neither identical nor mirror images. Together and individually they reflect the divine image.” (Womanist Midrash by Wilda C. Gafney, pg. 22)

In this Creation story we’re shown a Creator who is absolutely relational and interdependent with the creation. God comes up with relational solutions to the creatures’ problems, and keeps trying until the needs are met. The order in which God created was not hierarchical, but relational and practical. I’d like to share a brief quote from an article I read.

“Not only was the creation of the second human dependent on the body part of the first human, but also the first human in their loneliness is dependent on the creation of the second human... interdependence is (found) not only among human and non-human creation, but it is also evident in how God operates in the created world. God relies on the rivers, the dirt, the animals and the human(s) to fulfill God’s creative work in the world... the Creator God calls on the created world to be relational.”

But being relational involves having and making choices. It means making and breaking covenants, crossing boundaries with God and with one another. In just one more chapter the Creator and the creatures “will be entangled in a post-Edenic reality... interdependence is not fully lost, but it will be constantly threatened by greed, blaming one another and violence.”

Can humans, God's beloved creatures transform our penchant for over consumption and greed? Can we co-create with God a culture of interdependence with creation? I believe it's what we were created to do and to be. To borrow some of my favorite song lyrics from one of my favorite Canadian musicians, Joni Mitchell, "We are stardust. We are golden. And we've got to get ourselves back to the garden."

Resources:

Podcast #545: Garden of Eden – September 10, 2023 with Rolf Jacobson, Kathryn Schifferdecker and Joy J. Moore

Garden of Eden: Commentary on Genesis 2:4b-25 by Safwat Marzouk, Workingpreacher.org

Believers Church Bible Commentary, Genesis by Eugene Roop, pgs. 39-42.

Benediction –

I'll offer both a benediction and a meal blessing – whether you're eating your meal here or elsewhere... May the warm winds of heaven blow softly upon you, and may the Great Spirit make Sunrise in your heart. May the God of abundance bless the food which you are about to eat and may the Spirit of Love go with you from this place. Amen.