

Dark Times, Chaotic Times

Did you ever have a day that found yourself thinking, “How... did we end up... here!?”

That is the question that has been sitting at the top of sermon notes for the last couple days, before the events that transpired last evening.

I imagine this is now a question that doesn’t just reach for the narrative of your distant past but now may be front and center.

“How did we end up here?!” Where the political divide and vitriol have become so intense that we have been worried that it may boil over into physical violence, and last evening, it came to a point of an assassination attempt that took the life of one attendee of the Trump rally, and came within inches of taking the life of former president Trump.

I struggled to know what to do with what follows that question in my sermon notes. As one of the news commentators said, people are looking for some message of hope in all of this.

And the more I sat with this, the more it began to emerge for me that if there is to be a message of hope in all of these

events, it will begin with you. It will begin with a people of God committed to follow the way of Jesus.

At some point in our lives, we will most likely hit times that feel like a dark, formless, void. And in spite of working toward more loving relationships, good planning, and good resourcing, we can find ourselves in a situation that seems to have no clear way forward, no clear way out, and no way to undo.

And as a people of faith, believing that God goes with us, as in Isaiah 30 where God says to Israel that “whether you turn to the right or to the left, you will hear a voice behind you saying this is the way, walk in it.”

But instead, we may hear nothing, and we may wonder if God is even paying attention.

Those places can be Dark, Empty, and Formless Void. This can happen in our families, we see it in our Politics, our Mennonite Church USA denomination. It happens in school boards, our communities, and in our physical bodies.

Churches can hit that emptiness too. What makes being in those places so hard is that we often **can’t figure out what it means for us.**

We are meaning-making creatures. We need not just a sense of purpose but also of connection or belonging as we live out that purpose. We need to know the “why” of what we are giving our lives to.

When we lose our sense of meaning, we begin to lose our identity.

Losing ourselves is scary...

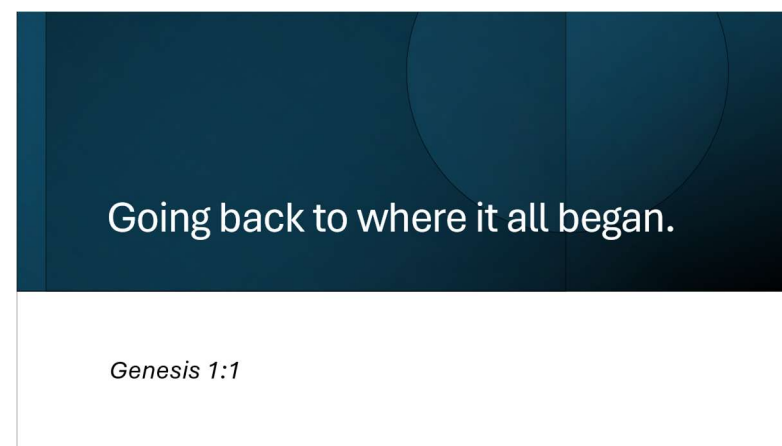
When we begin to wonder as a church what is our purpose in all of this and what does it mean if we can’t seem to hear that voice of God’s Spirit leading us, we may find our doubts leading us to wonder is this all just a meaningless exercise?

Even Paul found a way to honestly say that if Christ has not risen, then we among all people are the most to be pitied. Because following Jesus becomes meaningless.

When we find ourselves stuck and not being able to see where do we go from here, where do we go from this

crossroad, it is important to remember **how WE DID get here.**

In order to regain a sense of identity and purpose one of the most powerful things we can do is to go back to the beginning and tell our stories.



As a gathered community of faith, a church in worship together that holds scripture as our guide for who were created to be and the purpose in our lives, we must have a sense of where this all began and to do that, we must go back to the very beginning, Genesis 1:1.

Let’s consider for a minute, just the first five words.

In the Beginning, God created.

God brought something into existence that had not existed before.

But note this.

The beginning was not nothing.



The earth was there but it was formless, empty dark.

And there was water, deep water.

ARTWORK

The last time I preached on this passage I was looking for an image of what that formless void might look like to an artist. I didn't find anything I liked online, and I asked a friend of mine who is an artist, Barbara Gautcher, if she had any ideas and this is what she painted.

If I put myself in that picture, I think I could feel the reality of bone chilling cold, an emptiness, an aloneness, cloaked in darkness.

But that is not all that was there...

Verse 1 says that the **Spirit of God was hovering** over the waters.

God is not just present to the chaos, to the darkness, to the emptiness, to the undistinguishable messed up form that was there in the beginning.

This word for “hovering” is also used in Deuteronomy 32 where God is described as an eagle, listen to this depiction of God's presence.

10In a desert land he found him, (speaking of Jacob, the children of Israel)
in a barren and howling waste.
He shielded him and cared for him;
he guarded him as the apple of his eye,
11like an eagle that stirs up its nest
and **hovers** over its young,

(hovers is the same word as in Genesis 1 and this whole passage in Deuteronomy has this overtone of God's concern for God's wayward children, a God that)

that spreads its wings to catch them
and carries them aloft.

12The LORD alone led him;
no foreign god was with him.

(It was this God, our Lord, who was faithful, no other god was concerned enough to “hover” over him and deliver him.)

And here in the chaotic mess of Genesis 1, **God's spirit was there in the mess**, hovering over the waters, a

gentle, brooding, cherishing presence like an eagle cares for its offspring, as a hen hovers over her chicks.

From just these two verses we see that from the very beginning, God is present in the emptiness, cares about what is going to happen, and has the power to create something out the most chaotic situations.

Linden Tree



While I was writing this a Linden tree seed landed on my keyboard. The shade that shielded me from the intense heat of the sun begins in this tiny little ball.

The instructions for becoming a towering shade tree are written inside this tiny seed.

When our worlds get so dark, we must remember that the creator who hovers over us is holding a vast universe in place, from a tiny seed to the vastness of the universe where the earth is suspended on an invisible foundation and moves with precision. In the vast universe, God gives special consideration to this earth, this tiny, blue planet.

Consider the vastness of the universe for a second.

Where were you in 1977?



I was 13 and playing one of the hottest video games we knew, PONG.

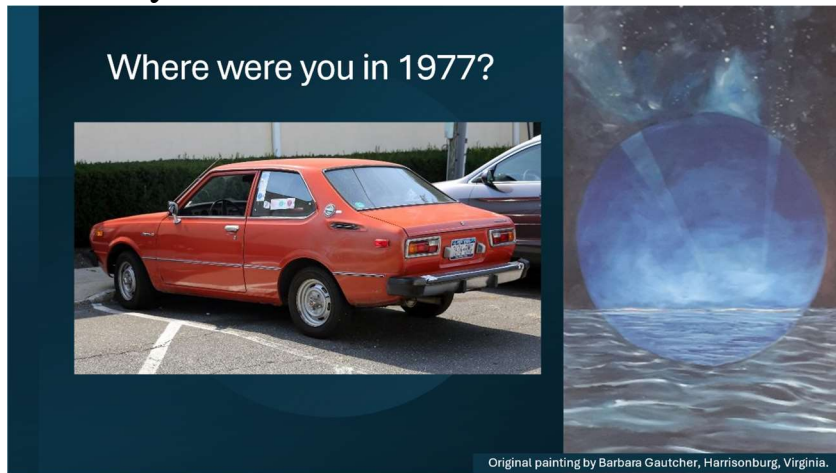
Think about that a second, just how much our computers have advanced since then – how much gaming has

advanced since then. Think how far all our creations have come. 1977 included the...

The AMC Pacer



The Toyota Corolla



And a truly amazing creation of its time -no sarcasm here, the Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 space probes were launched.

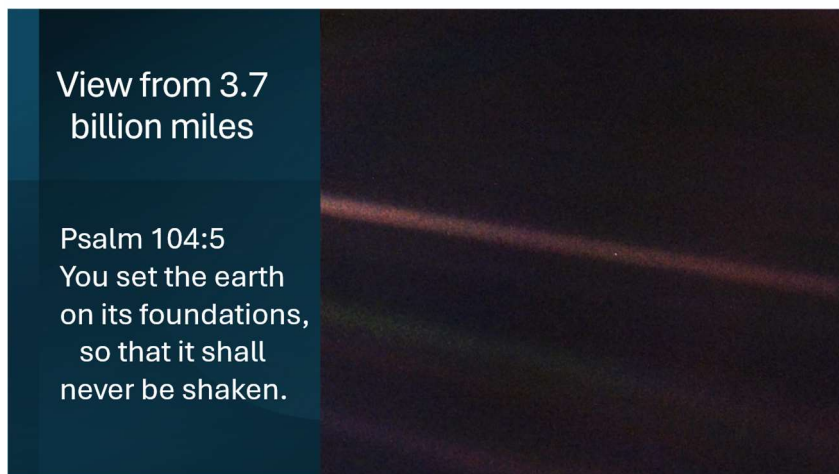


And they are still going.

On September 5, 1977, NASA launched the Voyager 1 satellite with the intent of exploring other planets as it passed them by and eventually to explore space beyond our solar system, the Milky Way. Since that time, Voyager 1 has been traveling at 38,000 miles per hour. Voyager 1 has now cleared our galaxy and began its journey into Interstellar space around August 2012, nearly 35 years after its launch and traveled more than 11¼ billion miles. Somewhere between 2020 and 2030, its nuclear power generator will stop powering its data communications. But, if it is ever

found by any other life forms, it has a gold-plated disc on board with recordings of music, literature, pictures, and other representations of life on earth.

One of the really cool things about voyager 1 is perspective. It gives us the opportunity to look back at ourselves and take our picture in our solar system.

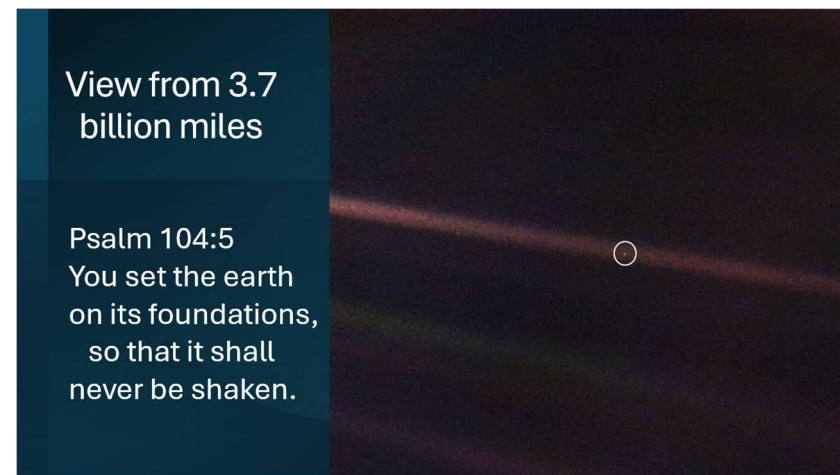


Voyager 1 sent back this picture of in 1990, when it was 3.7 billion miles away from earth. This became the iconic “pale blue dot” photograph.

I want to read Ann Druyan’s reflection on this picture. She is a science writer and was married to the late Carl Sagan, a famous astronomer and scientist. Perhaps this can give us perspective on our creator God and ourselves.

She says...

“This was the pale blue dot. It was our willingness to see the earth as one pixel in a far greater cosmos. It’s that humility that science gives us that weans us from our



childhood need to be the center of things. Voyager gave us that image of the earth that is so heart tugging. Because you can’t look at that image and not think about how fragile our world is, how much we have in common with everyone with whom we share it and our relationship, our relatedness to everyone on this tiny pixel.” – Ann Druyan

It feels so understated in the age of Voyager probes, the Hubble telescope and most recently the Webb telescope to hear in Genesis chapter 2: Thus, the heavens and the earth were completed **in all their vast array.**

And in addition to that vast array, we – humankind were created. We were created to inhabit this amazing planet and ecosystem.

God spoke: “Let us make human beings in our image,



make them

reflecting our nature.

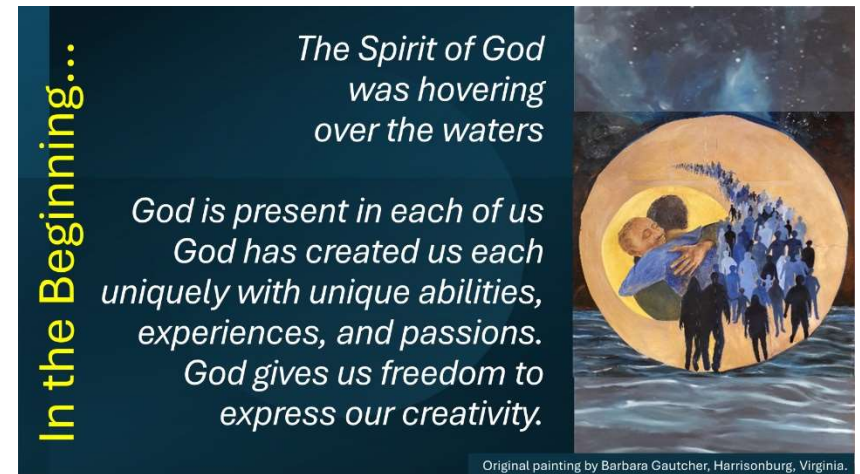
So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,

the birds in the air, the cattle,

And, yes, Earth itself,

and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.” Genesis 1:26-28 (The Message)

Part of being created in God’s image, our wonderful Creator’s image, is that we humans have been given the ability and freedom to also create – we too can bring something into existence that never was before...



Gordon Crosby speaks of our call to create in this way, “When each person is exercising their gift, they become an initiating center of life.”

God, who initiates life in us gave us gifts of creativity to that can initiate life in others. From life comes life.

Genesis 1:27 could very well say it this way, God spoke: “Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature,

...So that they can be initiators of life.

Elizabeth O’Conner authored a book aptly named, The Eighth Day of Creation. It is now our turn; we are called to create.

She writes, “*No community develops the potential of corporate life unless the gifts of each of its members are evoked and exercised on behalf of the whole community.*”

That is a beautiful image of what it means to be the church; people created in God’s image who use their creative gifts on behalf of the whole community.

What gift would I love to offer for the continuing act of creation? How can I initiate life in others?

Conclusion

The pale blue dot is a striking image that illustrates the great vulnerability of our existence as a global community. It is an illustration of the truth of Martin Luther King Jr’s words that *we must learn to live together as brothers or perish as fools.*

Jesus told us not to look for the destruction of our enemies, but rather, love them. That is good news for the pale blue dot.

Ephesians 2:10 says... “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

We are called to use our gifts of creativity to initiate life.

If we as followers of Jesus, can’t point the way to a peaceful society, I do not know where else humanity will find its way or its purpose.

May we hold on to God who has set the earth on its solid foundation, that tilts at 23 1/2 degrees, that spins at 1000 miles per hour, and is traveling at 67,000 miles per hour around the sun. And yet, it sits on an invisible foundation that, according to Psalm 104:5, cannot be moved.

May we trust in the God who created all of this and hovers over us with such care that God sent God’s one and only son to show us how to live on this pale blue dot.

And may we be willing to risk using our creativity to build the peaceful kingdom here, to love our enemies so that every human may hear the invitation to the eternal kingdom.

Carl Segan left us with these words, “*If a human disagrees with you, let him live. In a hundred billion galaxies, you will not find another.*”

Amen.