

The Creation Connection
Matt. 6, 25-33, Gen. 9, 8-15
Preached by Bill Blair
Babcock Presbyterian Church
Sunday, July 18, 2010

I am not a “preacher.” I am a scientist (an astronomer by trade), but I am also a Christian. Some of you may think that a strange combination, but I don’t, and if you have heard me talk before, you probably know that I try my best to work both of these world views (science and religion) together in my own attempt to view reality. It’s not that there isn’t the potential for conflict between these world views, but I choose to look at them together and assimilate the best of both into my personal faith journey. So hold onto your hats; I’m going to share some broad perspectives about how I view God’s creation and our connection to it.

As an astronomer and a person of faith, I am highly attuned to the awesome complexity, enormity, and mystery of God’s creation. One needs to go no further than to stand outside on a dark night in the country (or stare at a Hubble photo) to be amazed at the beauty and awesomeness of creation on the large scale. And one need go no further than a backyard garden or a walk in the woods to experience the fascinating beauty of the world around us, our “local” piece of God’s handiwork. In Romans 1:20, it says “Ever since the creation of the world, [God’s] eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things God has made.” I was delighted to see that the theme for this year’s VBS was “Caring for Creation,” because this is really an important truth to be teaching our young people!

When we think of creation, we tend to think of the “things” of creation: The earth, plants, animals, and so forth. Yet in his mathematical description of the Universe, Albert Einstein showed how space and time are both part of the Universe, and inexorably intertwined. “Time” is an aspect of creation that has always fascinated me. What is time really? Why does it only flow in one direction? How can we fathom the idea that the Universe was created some 13.7 billion years ago? And how does God fit into “time” as we know it? How can God be in the past, present, and future (while not pre-determining that future sequence of events)? These are interesting questions to ponder, even if they are unanswerable with any degree of certainty.

Geologists (scientists!) have come up with ways of estimating the time since various rock types formed (for instance, carbon dating and various radioactive half life measurements), and they tell the astounding tale that the earth formed some 4.5 billion years ago. As a scientist myself, I cannot shrug this off and pretend it didn’t happen this way. And I don’t believe in a God that would “play games” with creation, making it seem old to scientists even though it is much younger. Rather, I take these scientific “realities” into my picture of how

God has formed the Universe and let it inform my concept of God's awesomeness.

Some of you have seen my activity I call the "toilet paper timeline." If each sheet of toilet paper represents 10,000 years, then all of human history fits on one sheet. A 1000 sheet roll represents 10 million years. But it would take 450 rolls of TP end-to-end to get back to the formation of the earth, some 4.5 billion years ago! Clearly God's sense of time is different from ours!

I'm reminded of the old joke where a fellow is in conversation with God: "God, how long is a million years to you?" "*A million years is like a second.*" "How much is a million dollars?" "*A million dollars is like a penny.*" "Really? Gee, can you give me a penny?" "Sure," God says. "*Just a second.*"

To my way of thinking, it is OK that God is somehow outside of time as we know and experience it. Time is part of creation, and God created time as well as space and "things," so if God created it, God must be "separate" from it even while He is within it. Like an artist painting a painting, God conceived of the Universe and created it, and indeed is actively an ongoing part of that creation each and every day (God is still painting [creating], if you will). God is separate from creation, but is present within creation, just like an artist is "in" his/her creation. It's a mystery, but as Harry stated recently in a sermon on the trinity, some mysteries are not meant to be solved. In I Cor. 13:12, it says, "For now we see through a mirror, dimly, but then we shall see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known."

But the other amazing thing that this picture clearly elucidates is that "we" (the human race) are Johnnie and Janie-Come-Latelys, and that *God cared for creation for a long time before we came into the picture*. Indeed, numerous times in Genesis 1, God declares His creation "good" well before He created people to enjoy it (or exploit it as the case may be). We have such a self-important perspective of ourselves, that it is hard for us to imagine a Universe without "us", but that's the way it has been for 99.99% of the time since the creation event! We are one of God's most recent and most special parts of His creation.

God takes great care and is directly involved in His creation. In Job (of all places!) God makes this very clear in an extended soliloquy beginning in chapter 38 ff. "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" God says. "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion?" "Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you observe the calving of the deer?" "Do you give the horse its might, or clothe its neck with mane?" "Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars?" Etc. It is a stunning piece of text that declares God's majesty, connection to, and sovereignty over creation.

So as a special part of creation, we know that God cares for us as well. Recall our NT lesson from today: God cares for the birds and the lilies of the

field, but are we not of more value than they? But it is only a small step further to realize that *God also still cares for ALL of His creation, not just us*. It all matters to God and it all has value to God. And because we are special, we have been given a special responsibility by God to be stewards of His creation.

I can think of two contrasting analogies for how humans fit into the picture of creation. One is to perceive creation as a pyramid, with humans at the apex and all of creation under us, forming the base. We view ourselves as the pinnacle of creation; God's crowning achievement. In some ways, this is an attractive representation, but it leads all too easily to unhealthy and exploitative behaviors on our part. Self-destructive behaviors, really. (Imagine removing bricks one at a time from the bottom of the pyramid. Sooner or later, the pyramid is going to collapse.)

I think a better analogy is to think of creation as a spider web with humanity at the center. Creation surrounds us in expanding rings and strands, all connected together and supporting each other. (As an astronomer, I like this picture, because one can imagine creation expanding outward indefinitely, from our local piece of creation on earth to the solar system and beyond.) We are connected to everything in this picture and we are dependent on every link within the web. God is outside this web, and within it, and throughout it all. Of course, no analogy is perfect, and perhaps having mankind at the "center" of the web gives us too much credit; after all, it's not all about us! But it certainly demonstrates a central truth about creation, that we are all connected and interdependent.

In modern western society, we have increasingly lost this sense of "connection" to God's creation. To many people, food comes from a store. The idea that someone actually grows it in the ground is almost forgotten. Kids (and adults!) spend hours watching TV or looking at computer screens instead of experiencing nature first hand. And yes, if you really want to see the Milky Way and the starry majesty I described above, you have to work at it because city lights and pollution have taken that simple pleasure away from us. We need to intentionally find ways to reinvigorate our "creation connection."

In our Christian tradition, it is a sad truth that many of the most important connections to creation within the Scriptures have been minimized or even misinterpreted over recent decades, to the point that their original meaning has almost been lost. But when the Scriptures are read with open eyes, God's care for creation (and our responsibility to be stewards of that creation) comes through loud and clear.

As just one example, let me take the story of Noah and the Ark. Many of us have known this story since our early days when it was taught in Sunday school. At the end of the story, God makes a covenant and seals the deal with a rainbow as a reminder. Listen to what the Scriptures say in Genesis chap. 9:

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendents after you, *and with every living creature that is with you*, the birds, and the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, . . . that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. . . . I have set my bow in the clouds, *and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.*”

Notice, the covenant is not made with Noah, or with just people, but between God and the earth, which represents “creation” at large! I was blown away when I re-read this story and recognized this connection. Many other examples are to be found, if only we open our hearts to hear them.

In a very recent book, ***Green Like God -- Unlocking the Divine Plan for our Planet*** [highly recommended reading!], author Jonathan Merritt puts it this way:

Scripture teaches us with crystal clarity [that] God loves this whole planet. He loves it so much that He paused and took time to call it “good.” He loves it so much that he entered into a Holy Covenant with it. He loves it so much that He reveals parts of Himself through it. He loves it so much that He asked us to take care of it until He returns to redeem it.

So where does Jesus fit into this picture? Well, first and foremost, Jesus is God, so everything we’ve already said about God and creation pertains to Jesus as well. It is clear from John 1: 1-5, and Col. 1:15-20, that Jesus was with God at the creation event. [Read Colossians.] God chose to enter into His creation in a very special way, and that way was Jesus. Jesus was God within creation in a very human and tangible form. Make no mistake about it, Jesus is part of the plan.

As Christians, it is our duty and responsibility to care for God’s creation, not because it is the current fad, not because it is good for us (although it certainly is), and not because of some political agenda, but *because we are directed to do so by the Scriptures*. The Christian church as a whole needs to wake up to this call, and re-establish its “creation connection.” Maybe it can start right here at Babcock. Maybe it can start . . . within each of us.

Prayer:

Creator God, we thank you for the splendor of your creation, both near and far, and for the chance to understand, at least partially, just what it is that You created. Lord, too often we close our eyes, and take things for granted, not making the time to see you in our lives, in the people around us, and in the awesome grandeur of your creation. Help us to sense your presence through the

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world around us, and give us strength and faith and clarity of purpose to accept the responsibility You have given us as stewards of your creation, including especially the least of these, our brothers and sisters. We ask that you continue to be an active part of our lives, molding us into the kind of people, and indeed shaping this into the kind of world, that you intended. We ask it in Jesus precious name...Amen.