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CREATION: SECOND TAKE
Genesis 2:5-9, 15-22

Last Sunday we looked at the first creation story in Genesis. In Chapter 1, God creates the whole universe in six orderly days. God speaks and it happens. Creation by command. “Let there be light,” and there is light! First God creates light and sky then land and sea, vegetation, the heavenly bodies, the animals, and finally humankind.

In contrast, the story in Chapter 2 feels quite different. There the scene isn’t the vast universe, but one plot of land. On that plot God creates a gardener from the dust of the earth and breathes life into his nostrils. Then God creates plants for the garden. The man has a pleasant place to live and good work to do, but he’s lonely. To repair the situation, God creates the birds and the beasts. Adam is allowed to name each creature, symbolizing his authority in the garden, but he can’t find a genuine partner among the beasts. So God puts Adam to sleep, plucks out one of his ribs, and creates a woman to be his partner. Then the newlyweds live happily in the garden, for at least a while.

So that I can be very clear about this, I believe both stories are inspired by God and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can learn a great deal from both stories. However, I also believe that these are indeed stories, that is to say parables. Genesis is much better than a science book telling us how the world was created. Genesis is a Spirit-filled faith book, teaching us about God and about ourselves.

So it doesn’t bother me that the stories are quite different.

For instance, in the first story, God creates animals before people; it’s the other way around in the second story. In the first story, God creates man and woman at the same time; in the second story, it is a two-step process. The two stories use different names for God and are written in very different styles: the first is majestic and formal, the second is more like a storyteller sitting at your kitchen table.

As I say none of this troubles me in the least, and I have no interest in trying to make the details of the stories fit together. What does intrigue me is that these stories give us two different pictures of God—not contradictory pictures, just different pictures.

Let me explain. In the first story we meet a God who is big beyond all understanding, beyond all imagining. God speaks and things happen. God’s merest whisper is enough to create something from nothing. God speaks the universe into existence. God says, “Stars!” and all those galaxies and nebulae simply appear. And everything happens according to plan. Everything unfolds like clockwork, just as God intends. No glitches, no defiance, no failures.

You finish reading the first creation story and you think, “God can do anything! God has no limits, no weaknesses, no blind spots. God is in charge of everything.” If there were a soundtrack to the first story, it would have to be something big and rousing and full of praise, something like “Awesome God.” This is the kind of God who will knock you off your feet.

But in the second story we get a different picture of God. We meet a more hands-on God. In the second story, when God creates Adam, God kneels in the dirt, scoops up a pile of dust, shapes it into a little mud-man, then gives the kiss of life, breathing right into Adam’s face. In this story, God doesn’t speak a garden into existence; God plants a garden. You can almost picture God, choosing just the right plants, laying things out, digging the holes, and putting the flowers and bushes in place. No speck of dirt would dare defile God in Chapter 1, but in Chapter 2 you figure God is constantly tracking mud into heaven.

In the second story God is friendlier, more of a partner really. When God creates the animals, God says, “Go ahead, Adam, you name them. Platypus? Really? Oh, no, that’s a great name. Aardvark? Excellent!”

When Adam is lonely, God sets out to fix it. That’s because Adam is more than a gardener in God’s eyes. God cares about Adam—cares about his well-being, his feelings, his happiness. In fact, God clearly cares about Adam *and* Eve. Every evening, when the heat has passed and the breeze picks up, God drops by the garden, strolls around to see what Adam and Eve have been up to, and joins them for a little chat—just Adam and Eve and the Creator sitting around in the deck chairs, catching up, sipping on pomegranate juice. It’s beautiful, isn’t it? Truly beautiful.

Did you ever notice that sometimes you can take two pictures of the same person and they won’t look anything alike? Maybe it’s the light or angle or the facial expression, but two pictures of the same person and you’d swear it was different people.

We all know there is only one God, one Creator, one Lord. But these pictures in Genesis 1 and 2—it’s the same God, but the pictures look so different. When I read that first story, God sounds like Charlton Heston; in the second story it’s more like Jimmy Stewart.

Two stories, two snapshots:

- A lofty, cosmic God and a down-to-earth, see-you-tomorrow-afternoon kind of God.
- A God of infinite glorious power and a God with garden dirt under the divine fingernails.
- A God who puts everything in place, gives the orders, and then sits back to enjoy the view and a God who gets involved, adjusting the plan as things unfold, bending to this partnership with Adam and Eve.
- A God who commands us and a God who loves us and calls us by name.

I think one thing is missing from the first story, and that’s love. The picture of God in the first story is like a heavenly CEO—all-powerful, all-knowing, always in charge. The picture in the second story is more like a mother or a father—keeping an eye on us, helping out, hanging out, disciplining us when necessary, but always loving us, too—even when we don’t do our work, even when don’t live up to expectations, even when we make a big-fat mess of things—still loving us anyway.

And maybe that’s why we have two creation stories in Genesis, to help us understand both sides of God. If God were all-powerful, but didn’t care about you and me, where would that leave us? It would be like worshipping the sun or the storm—great power, but no interest in us.

On the other hand, if God loved us, but had no power to make a difference in our lives, what would be the comfort in that? I visited someone recently who was pouring out problems and I said, “I’m really sorry that things are so hard right now.” And the person said, “Well, that’s nice, but that doesn’t help me.” True enough.

A God of power or a God of love... We don’t have to settle for one or the other. Our God is both. Our God kindles the sun with a word and whispers peace to the broken heart. Our God balances the whole world on one finger and heals the leper with a touch. Our God tames the sea and breaks bread with sinners. Our God rides on the storm and welcomes children with a hug. Our God dies on a cross in infinite love and then rises from the grave with invincible power.

Thus, two creation stories because one version couldn’t tell the whole story of the God whose power will knock you off your feet and whose love will pick you up again.

Soli Deo Gloria!