

June 14, 2009

And It Was Good

*Gather around, everyone... time for a story -- true story -- of what the Creator did. As best we can tell, Genesis 1 was first read by Jerusalem exiles held captive in Babylon during the 6th c. B.C. Listen to this: our God, the God of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and David (and, we would add, Jesus) is the Creator of everything. Oh yes, not the gods of mighty Babylon, such as Marduk, nor any gods to come, Zeus or Jupiter or Unregulated Stock Market, but our God is the Creator of the world. What interested the exiles in the Genesis 1 story was not the beginning of the world, or earth history -- boring -- but **what God did with chaos**. In Babylon, life for these exiles had fallen into chaos: strange land, economic ruin, political prisoners, disrupted family life. Suddenly, they are given a true story about what their God the Creator originally did with chaos.*

“When God began to create...” We are used to hearing, “In the beginning God created the (everything)”... ex nihilo, out of nothing, big bang when God clapped his hands -- creation, period. But verse 1 can also be translated, “when God began to create,” with the emphasis on what God did with chaos already there at hand -- “tuhu_wahobu,” verse 2 calls it -- the formless void, the darkness covering the face of the watery deep, the primordial chaos. Tuhu wahobu: that is what interested the exiles about this story, the chaos and what God did with it, because they themselves were knee deep in chaos. Listen everybody, at the beginning of God’s creating the heavens and the earth out of the “tuhu wahobu,” God said “Light” and it was good! God said “Sky” to separate the waters of chaos, and it was good! God said “Earth” and “Seas” and that was good! God created sun, moon, and stars -- all good! And God made creatures including us, and that was very good.

This is what your God the Creator can do with chaos, create something new and good. God wrestles the “tuhu wahobu” into light and life and blessing. This is the beginning of all good news. It was good news for the exiles sitting in Babylon. It is good news wherever you are sitting when “tuhu wahobu” bursts in and knocks our world to pieces -- violence, cancer, homelessness, hurricane, economic upheaval. God is Creator, and this is the creating God does.

“God is our refuge and strength, (counsels Psalm 46), a very present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change... mountains shake in the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam...”

God puts order to chaos, wrestling the “tuhu wahobu,” renewing life and the world until we can say, *“And it is good.”* What God did with the chaos.

And **God is still creating**. That is the great news for the exiles and for us now. God is still creating. *The Creation* is not something past and finished and done. God is still creating, still wrestling chaos where it breaks out, still making it “Good!” Even as the Spirit-Breath of God first blew like wind across the face of the waters, God continues to breathe life into the Earth and its creatures -- creating still.

Do you see? *Creation* in Genesis 1 is not so much about the history of beginnings. The story told is not first of all about when and how the world began. The modern world would prefer that, has preferred that. If Creation in Genesis 1 is primarily a description of the beginning of the world, then the idea follows that the Creator, job completed, takes a backseat... the Earth has been set loose to see what we will do with it, God walked away on the 8th day and will check back later... perhaps someday pull the plug if it gets too bad. That is the modern world's notion, and it means to say the earth is ours. We have the whole world in our hands. It belongs to you, to us, to the strip mining company, to the political party in power, to the farmer, the landowner, to do with as we desire and choose. Creation completed, what is the need for God -- we now trust science, technology, political ideology, capitalism, and General Motors. Pride: God created the earth? Fine, thanks. We will take it from here. William Sloan Coffin noted that if you really want to upset things, walk into a Wall Street corporate board meeting and announce that the "Earth is still the Lord's."

That is what the exiles in Babylon heard in the story. It became their great hope. God is still creating, still speaking words of creation: "Light!" where darkness has overcome, "Health!" where disease intrudes, "Forgiveness!" "Peace!" And it is good. The Creator is still at work, not yet finished with this world. God is still wrestling the persistent "tuhu wahobu" into something good.

Therefore, **honor the Creator!** Let your life and home and business honor the Creator who is still at work for good. Honor the Genesis story that God and creation are "bound together in a distinctive and delicate way" [Brueggemann]. Honor what God is doing with creation past, present, and future -- God has created, is creating, will create -- until it is good. Honor the Creator.

Today is Green Sunday. This morning we lift up even more than usual the world which God has made, the ecology of this creation, its health and prospects. We think of what might contribute to a better world in which to live, a sustainable world for our children's children, if we do them together: from recycling to alternative energy to reducing carbon emissions.

The message from Genesis however must be this. We recycle because we are Christians. We explore alternative energy sources as a response to God who is still creating. We reduce carbon emissions in honor of the Creator. One might undertake any of these for economic advantage -- a better mileage car will save money at the pump or as a new market for your company. You might recycle because "Green" is hot, suddenly trendy. We do it to honor the Creator who is still creating this world and breathing life into it. The Bible invites us to be part of the ongoing story of Creation, what God is doing with this world to which God is still bound, wrestling the "tuhu wahobu" of pollution and melting icecaps and vanishing rain forests into something Good.

Let this empty bottle stand for what we can do: recycling... reducing waste... conserving topsoil... lowering our carbon footprint... protecting water resources, endangered species, rain forests, the air we breathe, the ground on which our children play. The Genesis story tells us that what we do with this bottle could honor God, our Creator who is still creating, who continues to wrestle out of impinging chaos new creation, renewed creation, creation that calls out, "And it is good!" Or, what we do with this bottle can become part of *tuhu wahobu*, chaos and darkness. The Genesis story leaves us with a question: Which side are you on?

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