



## **Planet Earth Sunday - Creation's Witness**

Genesis 1:1-15 & Romans 1:18-23 & John 1:1-14

September 6, 2015

The 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

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Today we begin our observance of a “Season of Creation.” Together with our brothers and sisters in the Episcopal, Catholic, United, Uniting and many other churches here, in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, France, Scotland, and South Africa we are participating in a new ancient tradition of reflecting on God’s relationship with creation, our relationship with God through creation, and our responsibility as stewards of creation. What’s new about this is the designation of September 1 through October 4 as “A Season of Creation” or “Creation Time.” What’s ancient is the witness and testimony of the Bible and the early church to the goodness of creation.

Our biblical texts from Genesis through Revelation emerged in a world where the dominant stories of creation explained the existence of our world as an accident, an unintended byproduct of conflicts between various gods and goddesses, or even a deliberate act of malice on the part of an ignorant and envious demigod. These stories of creation promoted a view of our planet and of physical existence in this world as second-rate at best, and at worst as a prison for human beings who were really spiritual beings trapped in decaying bodies of matter. Some stories of creation taught that the path to human happiness consisted in adopting a kind of stoic apathy toward life, passive acceptance and endurance. Other stories of creation held out the hope of escape from this life into a non-material, spiritualized heaven beyond the planet. In these stories creation is indifferent or hostile, even evil.

The Bible offers a different story of creation that promotes a different understanding of our planet and our physical existence. In the excerpt from Genesis 1 we hear God speak light and order into original chaos, giving darkness a place opposite the light, separating waters above from waters below, gathering the seas to enable the earth to appear, empowering the earth, the seas, and the sky to be filled with living things. God’s creation of the cosmos is a dynamic process that continues over time. As God orders and organizes the world, God invites and empowers the earth and the waters and all the creatures to continue the process of creation. And so the land, the sky, the seas, and all their creatures become co-creators with the one who set the process in motion. God evaluates the process and judges it to be good – not perfect – but good.

In Romans we learn that God is not separate from God’s creation. God is invisibly present in the created world, yet God’s eternal power and divine nature can be seen and understood by exploring, examining and the studying the world that God created.

Rob Bell has a new book called *What We Talk About When We Talk About God*. At the beginning of the book, he talks about things like galactic dispersal, an event called a singularity, neutron stars that weight more than two hundred billion tons yet fit in a teaspoon, how time bends and warps and curves, how subatomic particles disappear in one place and then appear in another place without traveling the distance in between, how something can be two different things at the same time. He concludes that science is teaching us that there is no clear distinction between matter and spirit. That the world is open and filled with surprises. It is bigger and smaller and more mysterious than we ever imagined; it is much more than just the sum of its parts, just as are we. Bell writes,

“your identity and thoughts and fears and favorite ice cream and opinions about Jim Carrey movies can’t be detected in your elbow or your nose or your pancreas... you cannot hold your soul in your hand ... whatever it is that makes you most uniquely you cannot be measured or assessed or even found in any conventional, rational, scientific way” (p. 60).

If these things are true about the universe, our planet, and ourselves, they are even more true about God.

Our Gospel text re-tells the story of creation by naming God’s creative power or energy, *logos* which is commonly translated as Word, but which can also be translated as speech or even as pattern. The gospel writer identifies this word/speech/pattern as the source of light and life, which is revealed to us most fully in Jesus Christ.

Jim Stamper paraphrases the opening lines of this gospel as follows:

Initially there was a pattern for everything.  
The pattern was God’s; God was the pattern.  
The pattern was always God.  
Everything came from that pattern.  
There isn’t anything else.  
The pattern is both the source of life and the meaning of life.  
It is a way of being alive in opposition to death, and death cannot overcome it ...  
The initial pattern for everything that is became a human being and lived among us...  
...to show us the pattern ...

The pattern Christ reveals is that universal pattern of the undoing of death that we call the resurrection. In his book *Love Wins*, Bell writes:

In the fall in many parts of the world, the leaves drop from the trees and the plants die. They turn brown, wither, and lose their life. They remain this way for the winter — dormant, dead, lifeless. And then spring comes, and they burst into life

again. Growing, sprouting, producing new leaves and buds. For there to be spring, there has to be a fall and a winter. For nature to spring to life, it first has to die. Death, then resurrection. This is true for ecosystems, food chains, the seasons — its try all across the environment. Death gives way to life.

...this mechanism, this process is built into the very fabric of creation. The cells in our bodies are dying at a rate of millions a second, only to be replaced at a similar rate of millions a second. Our skin is constantly flaking off and our body is continually replacing the skin cells with new ones; we have entirely new skin every week or so.

Richard Rohr reminds us that “what happens in the life of Christ happens always and everywhere” (*Immortal Diamond*, p. 79). He describes the resurrection — that universal pattern of undoing death — as the greatest and most beautiful thing that the human heart seeks and desires. He writes, “once you know that life and death are not two but are part of a whole, you will begin to view reality in a holistic, non-split way, and that will be the change that changes everything” (p. 81).

So what do we learn about Planet Earth from our Scripture readings for today?

1. We learn that creation is not the result of an accident, a byproduct of some process that has nothing to do with us. God intentionally created the cosmos, filling it with light and life and energy, empowering creation itself to continue creating. In God’s judgment, creation is intrinsically good; everything that God created is good in and of itself, and good for giving life and energy to something else. We are called to care for and preserve the goodness of the Earth and its creatures.
2. We learn that God is invisibly present in creation, yet in ways that we can see and understand if we pay attention, observe, study, and explore our world. In doing so, we can discern the nature and power of its Creator.
3. We learn from the God who is the Word made flesh that the goal of our existence is not stoic endurance or escape to a heaven light years away. Our life and our flourishing, our happiness and our joy “is located in bodies and matter and lips and arms and music and grass and water and eyes and relationships” (Bell, *What We Talk About...*, p. 148). The good news embodied in the crucified and resurrected Christ is that whatever tragedy befalls us: illness, bankruptcy, unemployment, divorce, depression, heartache, even death itself — God is right there, beside us with the promise that this is not the last word about who and what we are.