

“Creator God, Creating Still”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, May 22, 2005, and September 4, 2011

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Pastor

Psalm 8 Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a

1 In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. ¹²The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” ²¹So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²God

blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

24 And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

26 Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

27 So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” ²⁹ God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

² Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. ² And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

⁴ These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

Acts of God.

If you were to make a short list of composers
who captured the heart and soul of America,
Irving Berlin would make the list.

Berlin wrote nearly 1,000 songs.

In addition to composing such familiar favorites

as “God Bless America” and “Easter Parade,”

Irving Berlin wrote the all-time best-selling musical score:

“I’m Dreaming of a White Christmas.”

A Russian Jewish immigrant, he lived to the age of 101.

Until he passed away, he never stopped making music.

The aging composer once said, *“For me the question is,*

‘Are you going to be a crabby old man or are you going to write another song?’”

In an interview with the *San Diego Union,*

Irving Berlin was asked, *“Is there any question you have never been asked*

that you would like someone to ask you?”

“Well, yes, there is one,” Irving Berlin replied.

“What do you think of the many songs you’ve written that did not become hits?”

My reply would be that I still think they are wonderful.”

God, too, has an unshakable delight in what – and whom – God has made.

God thinks each man, woman and child is wonderful.

Whether or not they are a “hit” in the eyes of others,

God will always love and treasure the wonderfulness of God’s creativity.

Acts of God.

Acts of God – the phrase used by attorneys and insurance companies

to describe an event beyond human control,

a natural phenomenon or catastrophe such as an earthquake,

a hurricane, a volcanic eruption,

something natural for which there is no legal redress.

For example, a State Farm insurance claim report stated that

after the flood one Noah Smith was dismayed to discover

his house was not insured against acts of God.

The Holy Bible presents the creation of the universe as an Act of God.

It is not presented as a natural catastrophe, but *as a natural blessing*.

The poetic language of Genesis imagines God gazing in wonder

at what has been created

and what is still in formation, still birthing, still growing.

God looks upon creation and calls it good.

Good. Pure.

For those who have studied Latin you will recall the term, *actus purus*,

meaning “pure act,” which refers to any act of God.

Acts of God.

We read Psalm 8 as our call to worship.

William Shakespeare, desiring to admire God’s creative power,
quotes Psalm 8 in *Hamlet* -- “What a piece of work is man.”

O Lord, our Sovereign,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory above the heavens.

Out of the mouths of babes and infants

you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,

to silence the enemy and the avenger.

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars that you have established;

*what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?*

*Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.*

The Scriptures open with a magnificent hymn of creation.

The entire story of creation unfolds from a towering clause, “In the beginning...”

“In the beginning” comes from a single word
in both Hebrew (beresit) and Greek (Genesis),
which in turn becomes the title of the first book in the Hebrew Bible.

“Beresit and Genesis mean not the beginning of something
but simply The Beginning. Everything begins with
God.” [Claus Westerman]

God is one who acts.

Reality exists only because God acts.

God does not act alone;

God invites and involves that which is created to be a part of
creation.

*Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image,
according to our likeness;
and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea,*

*and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle,
and over all the wild animals of the earth,
and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”*

*So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

Genesis does more than relate the fact that God creates.

Genesis begins the story of what manner of Creator our God is,
and to what purpose.

For example, God declares the goodness of creation,
that creation is well-ordered, beautiful,
pleasing to God’s eye, and able to function as intended.

God’s creative power does not leave us passive.

God creates in such a way that all of God’s creatures are
engaged,
empowered, commissioned to act, to think, to dream, to
be.

Acts of God.

Sister Helen Prejean, the nun whose experiences with death-row inmates

led to her writing a book which was made into a movie, *Dead Man Walking*,

talked recently about creativity.

Sister Helen Prejean said:

“In creating, we imitate God...

To be a creator is part of what it means to be a human being.

I met a guy on death row in Arizona who had nothing...

So he would unravel his socks and out of the threads

weave little necklaces with crosses.

The first time I visited another death-row inmate,

he gave me a picture frame he had made out of gum wrapper foils.

These men were locked in a small cell 23 out of 24 hours a day;

they had absolutely nothing,

and still they were reaching out to create something of beauty and worth.”

Acts of God.

The writers of Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 let their imaginations play

upon the theme of the created world and its mysteries.

Mysteries that were as obscure to them as they are to us today.

And then the psalmist and the priest set down these great hymns of praise.

They praise God because they see behind creation

the mind and purpose of a Supreme Power,

one whom they have already come to know in their own experience,

and whose guiding hand

they have seen in the movements of history. (William Neil)

Both Genesis 1 and Psalm 8 are poems;

they are not to be read as eyewitness accounts

nor mistaken for scientific timetables.

Many people in our time insist that these Scriptures be read as journalism,

as reportage on the dawn of time and space.

Creationism is thus alive and well,

as many public school teachers and school boards will attest.

As Disciples we are equally inspired and interested in both

the Rock of Ages and the ages of rocks.

The power of God to create is not lessened by the science of evolution;

consider that the science of evolution is truly a spiritual testament

of the ongoing nature and nurture of God.

A God who can not only start life but also sustain it over billions of years

is a mighty God indeed, one who is worthy to be praised.

As a matter of fact, we see every day

the power of the continuing creative power of God in nature,
as Teutonic plates shift under the Indian Ocean
resulting in an earthquake that starts a tsunami,
and its ripples cover thousands of miles.

250,000 innocent people were killed last December [2004],

and many more have been impacted by the ongoing
reverberations.

We mourn the loss of life, and the grief and pain it caused.

We also acknowledge that God did not purposefully cause the
tsunami;

the God of love and grace is not cruel.

The tsunami was set in motion by a living planet

that breathes and moves and grows and changes every single
day.

We experience God in this case

in the grace and mercy extended to nations in need,

and in the opening of heavens gates to the innocents,

to the whole people of God.

Acts of God.

When she turned 21, Tammy Harris from Roanoke, Virginia,

began searching for her biological mother.

After a year, she had not succeeded in finding her.

What Tammy did not know was that her biological mother, Joyce Schultz,

had been trying to find her for 20 years.

One other thing Tammy did not know: the one she was searching for

was her coworker in the same convenience store where she worked!

One day Joyce heard Tammy telling a customer about her search.

Soon they were comparing birth certificates.

When Tammy realized that the woman she knew and worked alongside

was in fact her own birth mother, she fell into her arms.

Tammy said to a friend later, “We held on for the longest time.

It was the best day in my life.”

Each year, each month, each week, each day

we rub shoulders and share lives and experiences

with people we think we barely know.

Yet if they share a new birth in Jesus Christ,

they are our dearest relatives.

And if they share a part of the new creation,

we are bonded by the Holy Spirit.

And if they are *actus purus*, a good, pure act of God's love in creation,
then we are family.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Extra Material

A modern Christian who speaks and writes
with the heart of a pastor and the vision of a prophet is Max Lucado.
You may be familiar with the name of Max Lucado;
go to any bookstore or bookstore web site

and you will find in the religious section Lucado's Christian
books and meditations.

He was not always at home as a Christian;

he was not always aware that we live in the grip of the grace of
God.

One summer while Max Lucado was in high school

he worked laying pipe in a West Texas oil field.

At lunch time the workers in the oil field would tell jokes and play cards.

Max Lucado looks back and recalls:

For thirty minutes in the heat of the day, the oil patch became Las Vegas - -

replete with foul language, dirty stories,
blackjack,

and bar stools that doubled as lunch
pails.

One day during lunch a supervisor walked toward the workers.

Did he have a job for them that could not wait?

They wondered what he would say.

AUh, fellows,@ he said.

The workers turned and looked up at him.

AI, uh, I just wanted, uh, to invite...@

Max and the workers could tell that their supervisor was uncomfortable

with whatever he was trying to tell them.

AI want to tell you that our church is having a service tonight and, uh...@

Max thought to himself in disbelief, *AWhat? He=s talking church? Out here? With us?@*

AI want to invite any of you to come along,@ the supervisor

said.

There was silence among the workers.

Several started at the dirt.

Others just looked at each other. No one said anything.

A Well, that=s it,@ he said. AIf any of you want to go...let me know.@

After saying that he left. Max and the other workers began to laugh.

Five years later Max Lucado was a college sophomore struggling with a decision.

Max admits that he drifted from faith. He wanted to know Jesus again.

But the price was too high. His friends might laugh.

That is when he thought of the supervisor in the West Texas oil field.

The supervisor=s love for God had been greater than his personal concern for his reputation.

So I came home, Max says.

Throughout the pages of the Bible,

throughout the liturgy of worship,

throughout the daily experiences of our lives,

we discover a God who loves us and wants the very best for us.

Sometimes God speaks to us directly,

like when we commune with God through prayer.

Sometimes God speaks to us through the words of another,

like though the shy invitation from Max Lucado=s supervisor.

Sometimes God speaks to us generally,

as God did when Isaiah first heard the call to serve.

But the power of God=s love is always available.