

Pastor Chris Matthis  
Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Holy Trinity  
Saturday, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020  
Sunday, June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020

**Sermon:** Very Good Creation  
**Text:** Genesis 1:1–2:4a

**Focus:** The Triune God created a beautiful world for our blessing.

**Function:** That they would rest in the blessing of God’s beautiful, “very good” creation.

**Structure:** Story-Interrupted

**Locus:** “I believe that God has made me and all creatures...” (SC, 1<sup>st</sup> Article of Apostles’ Creed).

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen. God’s act of creation begins with an invocation: “In the beginning, *God* created the heavens and the earth.... And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light...’” (Gen. 1:1-3, ESV).<sup>1</sup> The term “God” refers to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. While all three Persons of the Trinity are divine, the word “God” by itself is often a shorthand reference to our heavenly Father. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God hovering over the waters of the deep. But what about the Son? Where is he? Who or what is the Second Person of the Trinity in Genesis 1? St. John the Evangelist gives us the answer:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1-3, 14).

Jesus is the living Word of God, the Word made flesh. He was God and with God in the beginning, and he made all things. So where is Jesus in Genesis 1? In the word of God, in God’s *speaking*: “And God *said*...” means Jesus the Word was active and at work in the very beginning—even before his incarnation.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

Just as the first creation began with an invocation, so also the *new* creation begins with an invocation. For, as we hear in our Gospel today, when we are baptized, we are born again into the name of the Triune God: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). In Baptism we invoke the name of God, and he give us his own new name. We are born again through water and the Word, for indeed, anyone who is in Christ is a new creation, a new creature (2 Cor. 5:17).

The world was also born of water and the Word. In the second verse of Genesis, we hear that “darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:2). In the beginning, there was water. Indeed, St. Peter writes that “the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God” (2 Pet. 3:5).

I know that the question of cosmic origins is at the core of the debate between scientific rationalism and the Biblical worldview. Many people wrongly assume that “science” is at odds with the Bible, and that the Biblical account of creation is nothing but myth and legend. In their imagining, the world began as an infinitely dense and infinitesimally tiny “singularity” that suddenly became unstable and exploded outward with immense energy, creating all matter that now exists. This concept is called the Big Bang Theory.

But here’s the real big bang: God said it, and—**BANG!**—it happened! God spoke to the emptiness: “Let there be light!” (Gen. 1:3), and there was light. God’s Word effects the reality it speaks. It does what it says. God’s Word does not return to him empty (Isa. 55:10-11). On each of the six days of creation, God spoke, and his Word brought forth light, energy, matter, and *life*. None of it was accidental or without design. Everything about God’s created order was

intentional and for our good. Indeed, on that very first day of creation, God called the light “good” (v. 4).

Sometimes Christians attempt to reconcile the Genesis account with the Big Bang and evolutionary thinking by implying that perhaps the days of creation are actually symbolic of longer periods of time, perhaps even millions or billions of years. After all, they rationalize, doesn't the Bible say that “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as a day” (2 Pet. 3:8)? Isn't it possible that the days of creation are representative of so-called “day-ages”?

That thinking is tempting, but it's not plausible, because Genesis doesn't speak about the six days in a symbolic way. It is true that the Hebrew word for day (*yom*) can sometimes be a symbolic moment or period of time, such as the long-promised Day of the Lord, or Last Day, when Christ will return to make all things new. Yet even then, Jesus' coming will be on a literal day unknown and unpredicted by us.

The Bible is quite clear that the six days of creation are literal, 24-hour periods of time. After all, after listing what was made on each day, Genesis repeats this refrain: “And there was evening and there was morning, the first day” (Gen. 1:5). “And there was evening and there was morning, the second day” (v. 8). “And there was evening and there was morning, the third day..., the fourth day...,” and so on and so forth (Gen. 1:13, 19, 23, 31). The repeated mention of evening and morning indicates that the passing of the hours occurred very much the same way “in the beginning” as it does today.

As if to underscore this even further, notice how the LORD God, Yahweh, refers to the creation when he gave Moses the Ten Commandments: “Remember the sabbath [seventh] day to keep it holy... For in six days the LORD made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and all that is in

them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Ex. 20:8, 11). God told Israel to rest on the seventh day because *He* had rested on the seventh day. Was Israel’s Sabbath day a symbolic sabbath or metaphorical rest? No, of course not! The Sabbath day was a literal, 24-hour period of rest from work. It’s a 24-hour day—just like all the six days of creation preceding it.

So in a period of just six days, God created the sun, moon, stars, earth, seas, plants, animals, birds, fish, and at last, his crowning achievement: humanity. Toward the end of the sixth day, God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Gen. 1:26). Here again we are reminded of the divine majesty of the Triune God: the plurality of persons and oneness at the same time. “Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness...” Here we encounter the beauty and wonder of what the Athanasian Creed describes as “Trinity in unity and unity in Trinity,” one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). All of us are created in the image of God. Every single person on this planet (all 7.8 billion of us) and every single person who ever lived was made in the image and likeness of God to love and be loved and reflect his image to the rest of creation by exercising dominion over it. It doesn’t matter what language you speak or what is the color of your skin or whether you are a man, woman, child, or fetus. You are “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14). Your life is a miracle, and you are not an accident. Black and white, brown and red—all are made in God’s image. No person’s life is of greater or lesser worth than any other person’s. For in him we all live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28).

God is Father of us all (Eph. 4:6; Mal. 2:10). That is why an attack on the life or dignity of any one of us is an attack on all of us. If we do not see the image of God in our neighbor, no matter how strange he or she may appear to us, then we ourselves have failed to reflect the image.

After God created Adam and Eve, the first humans, he blessed them (v. 28). Three times in our text God blesses his creation. First he blessed the fish and birds (v. 22). Then he blessed humanity (v. 28). At last, he blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy—special, distinct, set apart (2:3). And here is the blessing God gave to our first parents: “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 heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:29). In other words, God told Adam and Eve to start a family, raise children, spread out into every corner of the earth, and care for the Lord’s creation.

I know that the word “dominion” is confusing to many of us. We think that the earth is ours for the picking and that we can do whatever we wish to the planet. And so we have wrought ruin on the earth: air pollution, oil spills, nuclear meltdowns, and the extinction of species. All of this is a result of the Fall into sin. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the garden and ate the forbidden fruit, he punished them with death and pain and cursed the ground because of them. Indeed, in Romans 8, the Apostle Paul tells us that the whole creation was subjected to “futility” because of *our* sins (Rom. 8:20).

Dominion is not exploitation. Dominion is care and control—ordering of the chaos. Dominion is stewardship—right management of God’s gifts. Sometimes people speak of nature as “Mother Earth.” But earth is not our mother (that’s paganism!). If anyone is our spiritual mother, it is the Church. Yet the earth is our fellow creature—our sister, if you will.

Someday Christ will return and make all things new (Rev. 21:5). When he comes, the creation will be “set free from its bondage to decay” (Rom. 8:21). So shall we, when Christ raises our bodies from the dead and reunites them with our spirits to enjoy the new heaven and new earth. “And not only the creation, but we ourselves... groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for... the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved...” (Rom. 8:23-24a).

In the beginning, when God first created the heavens and the earth, he surveyed all that he made and gave it this appraisal: “Behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). We have made a wreck of things, but the creation will be good again someday. The creation will be better than good. The creation will be perfect, complete, fulfilled.

On the seventh day God rested from his work. He set apart the Sabbath as a day for rest because we need time to refresh ourselves by his Word and Sacraments. We need a day to set aside the work and let the Word work on us. None of us can go 24/7. God rested so we may rest also.

Quite notably, the seventh day is the only day that God did not close. Each of the six days prior echoes that refrain, “And there was evening and there was morning...” (Gen. 1:31). But not the seventh day. The seventh day never ended. The seventh day never closed. Why not?

I do not know for certain. But this is what I suspect: Now Jesus is our Sabbath. And the rest we find in him never ends. “Come to all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28-29). Right now we need weekly rest from our physical labors. But a Day will come when there will be not just weekly rest, but *eternal* rest—an end to sin and death. As the author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes, “There remains a Sabbath rest

for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). Lord Jesus, may we enter into that rest. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of  $\dagger$  the Holy Spirit. Amen.