

**Week 2, Sunday: The Garden of Eden**  
**Genesis 2-3**

**For Journaling or Discussing with Another:**

Scene 1: Read Genesis 2:4b-17

- What caught your attention? Anything different from what you remembered?
- The Hebrew word for man “Adam” is related to the word for ground “Adamah.” Adam is the ‘earth creature’. Why might this be important to the story?
- The earth creature (Adam) is given a vocation, permissions, and a prohibition. What vocations, permissions, and prohibitions has God given you?

Scene 2: Read Genesis 2:18-25

- Note that the book of Genesis begins with two creation stories. In Genesis 1 humans are created last; in this story humans are created first. The compilers of scripture are freeing us from the need to focus on the literal (what really happened), in order that we may focus on deeper truths. Regardless of how human beings ‘really’ came into being, what truths do think this story is conveying?
- What do you think is God’s original intention for the relationship between man and woman?
- Paul writes, “In Christ you are a new creation,” (2 Cor. 5:17) and “There is no Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, you all are one in Christ.” (Gal. 3:28) In what ways are we called to act as partners with others now?

Scene 3: Read Genesis 3:1-7

- How would you describe temptation? Where does its power come from?
- What is Eve’s sin, and what is Adam’s? How do these dynamics play out still?

Scene 4: Read Genesis 3:8-24

- The first question God asks of a human is, “*Where are you?*” Where are you?
- Note the repeated pronoun “I” in verse 3:10; clearly there is a preoccupation with self. What lures us and/or frees us from a similar preoccupation?
- Every religion must deal with the reality of evil in the world. Some religions conclude that there are multiple gods, some good and some evil. Genesis, however, attributes all of creation to one God, and then lays the cause of evil at the feet of disobedient humans. Why do you think there is evil in the world?
- As the story ends, God responds to human sin *not* with death. Thus, there is a measure of grace. Where is the grace in the story? When have you experienced God’s grace?

## Week 2, Monday: Offerings

**Scripture:** Genesis 4:1-16: *Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, 'I have produced a man with the help of the Lord.' Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. The Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.'*

*Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let us go out to the field.' And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?' He said, 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?' And the Lord said, 'What have you done? Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground! And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.' Cain said to the Lord, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear! Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.' Then the Lord said to him, 'Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.' And the Lord put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.*

**Reflection:** In the previous chapter the disobedience of the human creatures, Adam and Eve, led to disharmony in their relationship with God. Now the disharmony is spreading to human relationships and murder enters the story. Notice this is not simply a tale of two brothers in isolation. This is a story of the relationship between two brothers *complicated* by their relationship with God. Throughout Genesis, the humans will again and again choose autonomy over dependent trust, but God is still the author of the story and God does not leave them alone!

Here God inserts God's self into the story in a way that *unsettles*. Cain the farmer and Abel the shepherd each bring an offering to the Lord; this is an act of worship. We are told, however, with no explanation, that God prefers Abel's offering. We who want to keep our image of God as fair, impartial, and predictable may assume that the root cause of the disfavor lies solely with Cain. "Maybe his heart wasn't in it, maybe he held something back," we may wonder. Maybe, yet that is not in the story.

Suppose, instead, the root of the complication here is God. What if God remains *free* rather than bound to our human understanding of fairness and predictability? What if, in this ancient world where older sons were naturally favored, God had God's own reasons for repeatedly favoring younger sons: Abel over Cain, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, and Joseph over his elder brothers? Yet notice that God's love and protection is there for them all, there is grace at the end of the story for Cain, for Ishmael, for Esau, and for us too.

### To Ponder:

In what way or ways is your life an uncalculated offering to God?

### Prayer:

"O Love that will not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee, I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine ocean depths its flow may richer, fuller be." (*hymn text by George Matheson*).

## Week 2, Tuesday: Vocations

### **Scripture:** Genesis 4:17-26

*Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and named it Enoch after his son Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael the father of Methushael, and Methushael the father of Lamech. Lamech took two wives; the name of one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jabal; he was the ancestor of those who live in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the ancestor of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah bore Tubal-cain, who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.*

*Lamech said to his wives: 'Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.' Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, for she said, 'God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel, because Cain killed him.' To Seth also a son was born, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to invoke the name of the Lord.*

**Reflection:** Notice we have quickly moved from death, Cain's murder of Abel, to new life. Cain somewhere finds a wife and they have a child, and Adam and Eve, who must have mourned for both dead Abel and exiled Cain, have another child too. Here is the gift of new life following death. Life is spreading!

Part of the spreading of life is the gift of new vocations. In the first stories, the humans are engaged in farming, herding, and child rearing. Now other vocations are introduced: builders of cities, tent makers, metal smiths, and musicians. That last one is striking. This is still early in the human story and much organizing, settling, and building must be done; yet here already, the artists are lifted up as important.

Consider, why are the arts important? Certainly for entertainment; music and other arts can be a wonderful enjoyment and remedy for stress. So too, participating in the arts engages creativity, and creativity will be essential in creating civilizations and caring for the planet. Here is one more reason; often from the artists comes the telling of truth. We may expect truth from political and religious leaders and at times they deliver; yet at times out of fear, greed, or blindness they fail. Certain artists, however, have eyes to see truth and courage to express it. Civilization needs this!

**To Ponder:** Think of a song, performance, or piece of art that captivates you. What truth might be being conveyed through it?

### **Prayer:**

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life: such a way as gives us breath;  
Such a truth as ends all strife, such a life as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength: such a light as shows a feast,  
Such a feast as mends in length, such a strength as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart: such a joy as none can move,  
Such a love as none can part, such a heart as joys in love.

("Come, My Way, My Truth, My Life", text by George Herbert, 1593-1633, ELW #816)

## Week 2, Wednesday: Ancestors

**Scripture:** Genesis 5:1-11 (You may read the rest of Genesis 5 on your own)

*This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind, he made them in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them 'Humankind' when they were created. When Adam had lived for one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth. The days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years; and he had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died. When Seth had lived for one hundred and five years, he became the father of Enosh. Seth lived after the birth of Enosh for eight hundred and seven years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died. When Enosh had lived for ninety years, he became the father of Kenan. Enosh lived after the birth of Kenan for eight hundred and fifteen years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years; and he died.*

**Reflection:** Genealogies are important for the authors of scripture. They are used to describe origins of ethnic groups, show God's continued work throughout generations, and they connect major figures: Adam to Abraham, Abraham to David, David to Jesus, etc. Genealogies and blood-relatives were important for authors of scripture. Notice, however, how Jesus deals with his own blood-relatives. Once, Jesus' mother and siblings came looking for him. It was expected that, when told, Jesus would shift his attention to them. Instead, Jesus said, "*Who is my mother, and who are my brothers and sisters? ...Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, sister, and mother.*" (Matthew 12:46-50) Jesus does not abandon his family, remember that from the cross he entrusts his own mother to the care of John, something however is shifting.

You may have heard the saying, "Blood is thicker than water," implying that relationships with blood-relatives trump all others. Not so with Jesus, not so in the church. In the Church we become siblings in the way Jesus spoke of, and in baptism there is no pedigree. You may research your genealogy as a hobby and trace your ancestors back hundreds of years. You may be adopted and know little of your biological background. You may be descended from African slaves and have had much of your ancestral history erased. But you, whoever you are, are God's own child. God is your parent, Christ your brother, the Church's cloud of witnesses your ancestors. Since Christ died for all, in a way we all are siblings given over to one another's care.

### To Ponder:

- How are your relationships within your family a blessing? How a challenge?
- Whom might God be calling you to regard with a deeper sense of kinship?

**Prayer:** Thank you, O God, for planting me in communities: family, work, church, neighborhood, country, and world communities. In the varied moments of life, help me to discern which relationships I am being called to attend to, and which I wait on or leave for someone else's care. Amen.

## Week 2, Thursday: Cosmic Implications

**Scripture:** Genesis 6:1-4

*When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. Then the Lord said, 'My spirit shall not abide in mortals for ever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred and twenty years.' The Nephilim were on the earth in those days—and also afterwards—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.*

**Reflection:** This is an odd passage with the mythological sounding intermarriage of heavenly and human beings. We might go down a more literal road and speculate on the existence and nature of other heavenly beings; but the text tells us no more about them. We might go down a less literal road and speculate on how perhaps the community from which these Biblical texts arose were assuming super-human origins in order to understand how one tribe of people could be so tall or powerful; but that's got little to do our daily life now. Or, we could refrain from focusing on either the "sons of God" or the "Nephilim," whoever they might be, and focus instead on God.

This little passage is letting us know that the chaos and disorder that began in the garden is spreading further and further. In the beginning God created and all was in harmony, but then human sin entered the story and immediately there came disorder between couples (Adam and Eve), then disorder between families (Cain and Abel). Now the disorder has gone cosmic, the heavens and the earth are in disarray. God has a mess on God's hands! This is the created order that God will next wipe out in a flood; but then afterwards this is the created order that God will enter personally.

In Jesus, God entered into the mess in a way that, at the time, looked surprisingly weak; Jesus was executed after all, with the assumption that he'd be quickly forgotten. Yet Christ rose from the dead, he lives, and he is actively engaged. Still his ways are mysterious. Still his work may be hidden under what appears to the world as weakness. Still the created order, under the governance of sinful human beings, is often in disarray. Nevertheless, we live with hope and faith that God almighty is powerfully at work within it; trusting that the work of Christ has cosmic implications.

### To Ponder:

- When you consider the suffering or turmoil of the created order, what most troubles you?
- Where do you sense you, yourself, having a part to play as God's helper in God's efforts to bring healing, hope, justice, and order out of chaos?

**Prayer:** This is my Father's world; oh, let me not forget  
that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet.  
This is my Father's world; why should my heart be sad?  
The Lord is king, let heaven ring; God reigns, let earth be glad!

(“This Is My Father's World, text by Maltbie D. Babcock, ELW #824)

## Week 2, Friday: Evil

### Scripture: Genesis 6:5-8

*The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, 'I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.' But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord.*

**Reflection:** The word evil shows up today. We human creatures tend to use that word mostly when referring to others, those “evil doers.” However the author of Genesis here, and later Jesus and Paul will remind us that it’s not just *other* people who participate with evil, we do too; and it’s not just that certain actions are evil; so too, at times, are the inclinations of our hearts.

Some religious traditions insist that we can discipline our minds and will ourselves into pure and righteous behavior; thus becoming “*Good People*.” The Lutheran tradition has a more pessimistic or realistic view of the human heart, of the human condition. It seems that at least some of the time we simply cannot resist the lure of the question, “*So, what’s in it for me?*” Thus, we turn to God, begging for the movement of God’s Spirit within us to create that which we can neither will nor work. “*Create in me a clean heart, O God.*” (Psalm 51)

What if we stopped referring to other people *as evil*, and instead spoke of how other human beings are tragically *participating with evil*. Why? Because if others are viewed simply as *being* evil, their humanity is lost on us. It’s easier to drop bombs on evil doers. It’s harder to drop bombs on our human brothers and sisters living in communities where some are participating with evil in horrific ways. “There are no permanent enemies”, a friend once told me. Jesus said, “Love your enemies;” meaning not, “let them walk all over you,” but meaning that your counter-cultural behavior toward them might be means through which God might be at work mending creation.

**To Ponder:** In this day ahead, what enemy will you face or avoid ‘out there’ in the world? And what enemy will you face or avoid inside your own self? For what do ask of God?

**Prayer:** Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.

(Psalm 51;10-12, KJV)