

Week 1, Sunday: Darkness and Light
Genesis 1:1-5

Scripture: Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the 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. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

For Journaling or Discussing with Another:

God said, “*Let there be light!*” This is the first creative word. There is no sun, moon, or stars yet, (they do not come until day four), but now there is light!

- Recall a time when you experienced God bringing light into a dark situation?
- What does the darkness look like or feel like in your personal life, or our communal lives now?
- In the midst of the darkness, where might you encounter God speaking these words, “Let there be light!”?
- How is God calling you to, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

Via the history and enduring presence of racism in America, the terms ‘light’ and ‘dark’ often have been misappropriated to elevate those with ‘lighter’ skin pigmentation over those with ‘darker’.

- How might the Church continue to contemplate the first word from God in the Bible, “*Let there be light,*” while explicitly resisting racism?
- What happens in darkness that is essential to the ongoing creation?

Continued blessings engaging Genesis,

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Week 1, Monday: Science

Scripture: Genesis 1:6-8

And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' So 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. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

Imagine: Take a moment to picture the skies; the sunny blues and the stormy grays.

Reflection:

Here we have before us an ancient world view that envisions the earth surrounded by water, with the sky acting as a protective barrier. When the sky allows gaps in the protective barrier it rains. In our modern day, with airplanes and satellites, our science tells us otherwise. There is no escaping that the world-view of Genesis is ancient; and I personally have little interest in debates about the science of Genesis (*Was it seven 24 hour days, seven longer periods of time, or is it a mythological story like the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh Epic?*). I do, however, have interest in the truth that the story speaks; specifically, that creation is God's doing, that it is good, that there is danger in it, and that God does provide protection.

Here's one more truth. The truth is scientific exploration is another of God's gifts. I can imagine God saying, "Get out your telescopes and your microscopes, or just gaze at today's sunset. Look at the wonder and intricacy of what I have created, revel in it, and intuit that there is so much more that you cannot see or understand."

Notice that this day, day two, is the only day of creation in which the creative activity is not described as being "good." Maybe it's being left to us, with our modern scientific understanding, to continue the narrative. And God said, "Let there be a troposphere and stratosphere, a mesosphere with temperatures reaching -100C that would freeze you in an instant, and an ionosphere with temperatures so hot it would incinerate you in a moment." And the scientists discovered how this protects the planet and exclaimed, "Wow, this is good!"

To Ponder:

How does time in nature nurture your soul? What helps motivate you to get outside and into nature on a regular basis? What gets in the way of that?

Prayer:

Thank you God for the air, the water, the woods, the seasons, the earth. Thank you for the ways they protect us, and for the ways they lead us into wonder. Amen

Week 1, Tuesday: Seeds

Scripture: Genesis 1:9-13

And God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.' And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then 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. The 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. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

Imagine: Take a moment to picture the seas and the dry land; beaches, woods, and vegetation.

Reflection: The word “seed” appears multiple times, the plants have seeds and so too the fruit trees. Thus, not only will they “bear fruit” providing food and beauty for the creatures who will be created next, but they will also pass on their genetic code, reproducing themselves in future generations.

The church community is like that too. We are called to “bear fruit,” that is to live and act in fruitful ways now (*doing what matters to God*); and at the same time, we are to sow seeds for future generations. So we offer such things as worship and Sunday school where we retell the old stories and seek to connect them to life today. At times these bear fruit now; then too, often in ways we do not see, they sow seeds that may not sprout for years to come.

Here are some seeds we may experience God planting in and through our church communities:

- The call to a relationship with God is a seed planted in us. Although beyond our ability to fully understand or pin-down, we proclaim there is a God who is real, present, and active in this world. Our relationship God is alive; in mysterious ways it bears fruit.
- Faith, hope, and love are both fruits and seeds. Like a piano player may practice for a long time before a performance, the community teaches us ways to practice our faith. In community we find ourselves led to engage in worship, prayer, study, serving, giving, and encouraging; and through these God mysteriously nurtures such things as trust, hope, and love. There may come times of great transition or trials in which the seeds of faith that were sown earlier bear fruit.
- Wisdom is a seed. We may glimpse in certain others who have been shaped by faith a particular quality of life: a measure of love, joy, peace, patience kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control (Galatians 5:22). The Holy Spirit at times uses the example of others to sow new seeds in us.

To Ponder:

Who has been an important model of faith for you? Bring this person to mind. How did this limited, blessed human being bear fruit; and how has God sown seeds in you through them?

Prayer:

Thank you, O God, for planting something of your Spirit, your truth, your life in us. Lead us and guide us this day to be the “pleasant planting” that you intend us to be. Amen

Week 1, Wednesday: Seasons

Scripture: Genesis 1:14-19

And 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, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.' And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

Imagine: Take a moment to picture the sun, moon, and stars; crisp cold and blessed warmth.

Reflection: And God created the *rhythms* of life: the sun for days and years, the moon for months, and the Genesis chapter 1 creation story for weeks. These rhythms go deep; so deep that in the story, we encounter the line, “*there was evening and there was morning*” on each of the first 3 days, even though the sun and moon are not created until day 4. The rhythms go deep in us too; though in our modern society more and more people are ignoring them or are being driven out-of-rhythm by the crushing demands of making a living. Consider your own rhythms.

What about your *daily* rhythms? Sleep, rise, pray, eat, work, exercise; love God, love your neighbor, love yourself. *Where are you in rhythm? Where are you out of rhythm?*

What about your *weekly* rhythms? Is there one day, where you put the bulk of your responsibilities into God’s hands and see if God is strong enough to carry them?

What about your *monthly* rhythms? Entertaining, connecting with friends, giving and serving in some way for God’s work of the healing of this world? Where and when does that happen?

And what about your *yearly* rhythms?

The story of Genesis is the story of God creating an “in rhythm” world, where all is in harmony. Then human beings disobey and bring disharmony: people out of relationship with each other, with animals, with the creation, with God. What is God to do? Good news, God has entered the disharmony in the person of Jesus. He died and he rose, the first fruits of a new creation, and he is at work harmonizing the brokenness. He offers to be at work in your disharmony too!

To Ponder:

What might an “in rhythm” schedule look like for you? What one concrete action might you take today in order to resist the forces of this world that seek to pull you out of rhythm?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, at times it can feel as though we are singing the song of our life mostly alone and out of rhythm. Sing in us. Help us to hear your voice bringing harmony and rhythm into our song. Amen.

Week 1, Thursday: Monsters

Scripture: Genesis 1:20-23

And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.' So 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. God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.' And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

Imagine: Take a moment to picture the oceans swarming with life, land creatures, and birds.

Reflection: *Sea Monsters?* There among the cute little birds and swarms of fish the author mentions sea monsters. It serves as a reminder that from the beginning the world is never been a wholly safe place, and never has it been ours to fully control. Genesis was compiled thousands of years before New England whaling ships and the modern fishing industry. Today the sea monsters are for the most part within human control and we human creatures are presently trying to figure out how to keep from exterminating whole species. *Now who's the monster?* Yet still the creation is not safe for us. It's no longer the huge sea creatures that threaten us, but miniscule mosquitoes, ticks, and viruses bearing EEE, Lyme, Covid-19 and other diseases.

Many people find great renewal in nature; hiking, camping, canoeing, etc. Yet this is precisely where the ticks and mosquitoes live. In order to enjoy nature, one must risk getting bitten. This may serve as a sort of metaphor of life. We can lock ourselves in our safe homes, safe offices, safe churches even, where we are for the most part protected from other human beings who carry something of the monstrous within them (*as do we all*); or we can risk advocating, risk connecting.

Jesus took this risk; he was bitten by the monstrous that exists within humanity and died from the bite. Yet this was the means of God giving new life. Jesus calls us to follow.

To Ponder:

- Where might God be calling you to step out of the illusion of safety? To risk engaging another in this culture that carries such threats as fear, hatred, and greed?
- What of the monstrous resides in the sea of your being? Bring it to the surface so that it can be seen and named, confessed and forgiven; a means for God's ongoing work of restoring our humanity.

Prayer:

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. (*Evening Prayer, ELW page 317*)

Week 1, Friday: Image of God

Scripture: Genesis 1:24-32

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. 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. 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. 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.' 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. 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. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Imagine: Take a moment to picture the human family; people on each continent, old and young.

Reflection: We are made in the image of God; but are left to discern what that means. Everyone else is created in the image of God too, (the beggar, the suicide-bomber, your neighbor whose political views rub you the wrong way) and we're left to discern what that means too.

What it means to be created in the image of God has been debated by theologians and philosophers for millennia. Is it a higher form of consciousness or reason, the capacity for self actualization, something spiritual or moral? There is no once conclusive answer; yet there are two aspects of this "image of God" that we encounter in the text above. First, like God we are to serve as caretakers. The human creatures unlike any other are entrusted with the task of caring for the rest of creation. It is this care that is behind the word dominion. We are not to have domination, as if we were selfish gods, but dominion as those who have been appointed as stewards by the one true (and unselfish) God.

Second, like God we are creative. Creativity is necessary for our caretaking. You and I, each and every one of us, are created in the image of our creative God. Think about what gives you joy in your work and/or life; isn't it something that touches upon your creativity? And if there is no joy in your work or life, is it perhaps because there are few if any opportunities for the gift of your creativity to be received and/or acknowledged?

To Ponder: Where and when do you find your creativity engaged? How are being called to make room in your life for creative endeavors?

Prayer: Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. (Daniel Iverson)