

Genesis 1:1-2:3
June 19, 2011
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church

I do not need to tell you that for many this passage has become a bloody battle ground of debate. The community of faith has ruptured time and time again over the interpretation of these opening lines of Hebrew which were subsequently translated into Greek, Latin and 17th century English. When were they written? No one knows. Did it begin as an oral story told at tribal gatherings and eventually written down and formalized into scripture? Was the story adapted from similar stories from other ancient cultures or the other way around? Was it dictated by God to Moses word by word? No one knows. Whatever affirmations we make about this profound and beautiful text is based on faith.

Now having said this, I want to stress that when I say “faith” I do not mean a sort of lukewarm agnostic response to the text. However these words came together they are sacred; that is, they are set aside from all other human words and are understood to be of God and from God so that God may be recognized as the Source of all that is. Whatever else the writer of these words may have meant; the clear intention is to make one point. The heavens and the earth and all of life are not the result of accident. Creation is the outcome of a Creator who has many names. In this case, the God of creation is called *elohim*.

This one affirmation is radical in today’s world. Never before has science come nearer to explain the origin of creation independent of the agency of a creator. Recently the brilliant astrophysicist and mathematician, Stephen Hawking, suggested that the final proof of a natural explanation for creation is within the grasp of the human mind. We cannot blindly dismiss his claim. I am sure there are those who have consigned him to hell for his masterful work of deception. But we must not do so. We must not describe his work as deception. Nor will it do to stonewall his work with this chapter of the Bible. If we do we will be joining a long line of Christians who jailed and burned people for discovering that the way the creation actually *is* differs profoundly from the account we just recited together: the most famous instance being the forcing of Galileo to renounce his agreement with Copernicus that the earth revolves

around the sun, not the other way around. Instead I propose that we must be grateful to all who in every generation have explored God's creation and discovered a richness and complexity of life that has immeasurably enriched humanity and has led us to recognize that, whether by accident or not, creation is precious and worth our continual exploration and care.

But if we must not dismiss the fruit of the scientific mind, we are not bound to accept its ultimate conclusions.

Now usually I am a "both-and" kind of guy as opposed to an "either-or" kind of guy. That is, there is more than one true experience of something. I can say that ginger ice cream is the best flavor of ice cream and not be troubled at all that you insist that asparagus ice cream is best. We can both go to the ice cream stand and be happy with our selection and happy in each other's company. I can be a Christian and you can be a Jew or Muslim and we can both be connected to the God of our understanding *and* in each other's company with no need to make one of us agree with the other.

It is even possible for liberals and conservatives to do the same thing—that is to hold deep beliefs that disagree about the approach to what is best for our country; yet who acknowledge a common loyalty to our country and respect that each seeks the common good. The same holds true for those engaged in the pro-life-prochoice debate, human sexuality, health care reform or even sports team loyalties. In every case this is because, as strongly held a my belief may be and as much it may differ from yours, there is something greater than both of our perspectives that allows us to hold our position and yet be comfortable in each other's company. I do not need to be right to feel secure. I do not need you to be wrong in order for me to feel good about myself.

But I confess I cannot see a "both-and" response to the question of the ultimate cause of creation. *Either* there is a God who created the heavens and the earth *or* there is not. By faith I place the whole weight of my life on the presupposition that there is a Being who initiated the chain of events which have resulted in the grand, mysterious and ongoing creation that is our universe. It is this assumption about the ultimate source of life that determines everything else I believe about life. Do I believe in the literal biblical account of a seven day creation? No. Do I believe that the account of how God put the world

together to be literally true and to be the basis for all scientific inquiry? Certainly not. But having said this it is a fundamental rock on which I stand that the supreme power of the universe who I call God exists and caused creation to come into being—including mosquitoes. I propose that the proponents of what is presumptuously called “pure science” *believe* that there is no God. This presupposition guides their work just as my belief guides mine.

And having said this I want to go farther—*much farther*.

Because I accept that God created the heavens and the earth, I believe that God did not do so on a whim. God wasn't bored one day and decided to create the heavens and the earth. Believing that God created creation allows me to ask, “why”? My answer is a statement of...*faith*. My understanding of why God created is informed by the great teachers of the Jewish mystical tradition represented in the Kabbalah. These teachers assert that the essence of God is what they call, “the desire to impart.” In other words, at the very heart of the Supreme Being is the desire to give, to create, to share. The yearning from the deepest dimension of God caused God to express with infinite creativity the explosion of energy that continues to burst forth to the very edges of the expanding universe. Each new birth is evidence of God's ongoing creativity. God is no mere first cause which started creation and then withdrew to let things develop on our own. God is still creating.

Going still further, with the great sages I believe that God is not indifferent to creation. Indeed the deepest level what moved God to create and to continue creating is *love*. Indeed writings of the Kabbalah teach that creation in general and human creation in particular is created in order to know God and to receive the love and wonder of the life God creates. We do not need the endless books of theology on the meaning of life to understand this. It is all about this simple transaction. God yearns to give and yearns for us to receive. It is as simple as what motivates two people to bring children into the world or to adopt children: so that these young ones can know just how much they are loved. That is why God sent Jesus into the world that we could receive God's love personally as daughters and sons.

If there is any truth to this, then one way of understanding all the violence, greed, fear and suspicion in the world is this: *God* yearns to *give* but *we* do not *receive*. God gives in overwhelming

abundance. We believe in a world of scarcity where we need to grab and hold onto whatever we can get. And tragically, we somehow never have enough. So let us not blame God for all the earth's trouble. Let us not use the tired explanation that there is no God because of all the evil that we see around us. Let us attend to our unwillingness or inability to receive what God has given first. Let us open our hearts to the gift of God's love for us and for the world in Jesus Christ. If we have truly opened our hearts and received the gift of the beauty of the earth, the glory of the skies, the love that from our birth over and around us lies, then let us decide whether God exists or not.

I am not worried about the outcome of the journey. Amen.