

One God, One Life

Genesis 1:1-2:3-the story of creation and the creation of humankind in God's image

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In the beginning God,

In the beginning goodness...

The essence of creation...then and now is God's goodness.

Creation is a non-negotiable given.

It shapes and reshapes our lives in God's good image. That's my point ...the goodness of God's ongoing creation.

Keep that in mind! Creation is all about God and ...you. There are those who prefer to think of creation as a past event. Something done only once that we human beings screwed up so badly that there will be hell to pay when Jesus decides to put his judgment robe on and separate believers from non-believers.

I've never fancied this view, for a number of reasons, but until Matthew Fox came along and challenged Augustine's notion of original sin with the notion of original blessing, I struggled to give voice to my own belief that human beings are more than the sum of their actions.

You've heard of recovering Catholics? Well, I'm a recovering Calvinist. Struggling to get beyond the force field of negativity that permits human beings to be viewed so badly in Western Christianity. Unlike their Jewish predecessors and their counterparts in Eastern Christianity who recognized the divine nature within humanity, Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin fixated on human failures. The problem is not that Christians who looked to Rome for guidance never had anything good to say about humanity... its that the weight, the burden, of what they believed always found human existence wanting.

Consider John Calvin's worldview. In Calvin's view the power of sin took humanity's God-given potentialities and rendered them useless for salvation. Calvin also believed the devil was real, (I no longer do!). In the battle for human souls, God's primary adversary, the Devil seems to always have God on the run. Thus God's only choice for dealing with believers involved threats and chastisements that compelled sinners to turn to God alone for salvation.

No matter that God's primary motivation was love, Calvin's perspective forced the believer to see himself or herself as separated from God in this life and always at risk of losing their special status in the next. That's a difficult mindset to carry on one's shoulders for a day let alone a lifetime; but many of us have done just that...and many still do.

Too many of us believe that God's life and our life are separate entities. Once a part of God's good creation, we have fashioned a world that is antagonistic to the divine life. The recent papal transition reminded me ...as if I needed reminders... how entrenched this view is. The election of Cardinal Ratzinger, now Benedict the 16th, propels Calvin's arguments about humanity's flaws front and center. No the Pope is not a Protestant, but just as Calvin looked to Augustine for his views on humanity, Augustine has been this Pope's guiding light for decades. I doubt Benedict will choose to replace him any time soon as his spiritual confidant.

For Benedict/ Ratzinger, faith is not about philosophical reflection—life engaging faith in conversation. No, The essence of faith in Benedict's view is not thinking new thoughts but rethinking what has already been heard and revealed about God in the Bible. From this vantage point theologians who beg to differ, and many have, have found themselves silenced by Ratzinger in his former role as guardian of church orthodoxy---He saw to it that they were removed from their teaching posts and denied the authority these positions once gave.

The Pope is not stupid... he's a very bright man, who speaks several languages and is well read and well versed in Christian Tradition. Even so, I doubt that Benedict the 16th would look favorably on the bumper sticker I came across this week. The sticker said. "Don't believe everything you think." That's right don't believe everything you think! !!!!!!! Think about that!

That's my next point.... Don't believe everything you think... about God and what it means to be human. Why? Because our beliefs shape our actions in the world and too often what we think we think is not what we think at all. Now before you fear that I am going to open my 450 plus page dissertation on communion and imagination and recite it every Sunday...let me cut to the quick...well actually... to the cat: the cat in the hat to be precise and Suessical the Musical.

Ann and I had the pleasure of seeing this wonderful production at Woodland Hills UCC church a few weeks ago. The Cat in the Hat had other places to be and see today, so here's my version of the Cat in the Cap (June dons her black academic cap).

“Oh, the thinks you can think
if you're willing to try...
if you open your mind...

Oh, the thinks you will find
Lining up to get loose...
Oh, the thinks you can think
When you think about... [JeSeuss]!

Oh, the thinks you can think!
if you're willing to try...

When your thinks have run dry,
In the blink of an eye
There's another think there!

If you open your mind,
Oh, the thinks you will find
lining up to get loose!

Oh, the thinks you can think when you think about [JeSuess]!”

So, what's in your thinker? Not on your mind but in your body mind? All of the you that exists today creates what you think. Jesus said it is done unto you, as you believe. Do you know what you believe about God? About being fully alive in God's life?

Try to get beyond what someone told you to believe, and think about what you think? What you know deep in your own bodyspirit. What's in your thinker? What do you believe deep down where nobody else can see? I don't want your answer today as you go out the door. I just need you to join me and risk thinking thoughts you never thought you could think.

Why? Because in the beginning God, and in the beginning goodness remains the most important link you can think about God and God's creation. To be in awe of God and God's creation is to be aware that we are forever part of that which we are in awe about! If you saw Lily Tomlin's performance of Jane Wagner's play, The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life In the Universe you'll recognize this think: we are forever part of that which we are in awe about!

Don't worry if you don't get everything I say today, just remember this: there is one life, that life is God's life and, as Ernest Holmes was fond of saying, “that life is our life.” It takes time to reflect on what we think...to hold a mirror up to our thinking selves and ask ourselves honestly if what we think, in other words what our life experience has taught us to think, is still serving us well.

Rethinking or repeating your thoughts is a helpful process some of the time, but it won't help you be the fullest expression of God's life here and now. God calls each of us through the person of Jesus to re-lect on the consequences

of our thinking, as persons and as church. If you believe there is one God and one life you will never be alone, because you will know the goodness of God is at the heart of who you are. Praise God for that!

If you believe your life is unworthy of God's life, which I did for more years than I care to remember, you will deny yourself the very life God intends you to have—a life of goodness, and joy, love and harmony, peace and prosperity. I'll bring this reflection to a close by sharing first a poem and then a song.

First the poem...don't worry about catching every word...I'll make it available on the church's website for anybody who wants it. This is what I believe and its called

GOD'S WORK OF ART

I
Am
Because
God is!
God the maker, builder, shaper, God the poet, painter, artist,
God the dreamer,
dreamed a dream and called me forth
Me, you, we, us,
All of us together,
You and I were a gleam in the eye of God
A hope in the heart and a whisper in the ear
She felt us in her womb before we had a shape,
He took us in his hand before we had a body
God
Divine mystery
Miracle worker
Wonder of wonders
Gracemaker extraordinaire
Said I love you, before I was.
Said I believe in you before I believed in myself
Said walk with me before I could crawl,
Said you are because I am
Said I am because you are
God, that mysterious presence that lives in and through all things, even us, you and me said come,
come forth from my womb, my heart, my hope, my love.
Be my heart, my hope, my love, my truth, my... playmate
I want you to be,
I want you to be free... to be whole... to be light, ...to be love
So...Become love
Become grace
Become compassion
Become all that you can
Because you can
See I set before you wide horizons and deep canyons
I set before you majestic mountains and a big sky
I give you possibilities unimagined
And the gifts to imagine them,
I give all things to you not to have, but to hold, not to hide, but to cherish
I give you wisdom to know
I give you knowing to share
I give you words, and sighs, laughter and tears
To express the inexpressible

To touch the mystery that has no boundaries, to be the mystery
(sigh!)

In the beginning I was, and will always be,
In the beginning we were together, whole and free, big and beautiful

So it will always be
Eternity is yours
you need not earn it
grace is yours too
abundant, and amazing,
fragile and free,
strong and sturdy
light and lively
wise and wondrous
all of it yours for the asking.

Take heart, then
my heart
full of courage, strength, loving kindness, and yes, breathtaking forgiveness
weave from these a life,
a tapestry of wonder,
but be not fooled

I design you for purpose not perfection
you cannot take a road where I will not be, you cannot find a place I have not been
you cannot build a world too small for me to find you
death may come, sorrows may haunt, and fear may batter you
but through it all, my embrace is unbreakable
I will not leave you I cannot leave you,
Remember? I am because you are.

And so the time has come
You are ready, you can do this, I believe in you.
you are one with me and I with you
You are one with each other too.

You are not alone, nor will you be forgotten
in the hollow of my heart there is a place for you, each of you
a dream and a prayer too

Whatever happens, remember this
you are not a mistake, you are not a lost cause,
you are not a regret
a work of love, definitely
a work in progress, but of course
a work of art you better believe it !

The song, I Return, is written by David Ault, www.davidault.com let the music and words fall gently on your spirit and remember Meister Eckhart's words... God is at home...it is we that have gone out for a walk! [CD plays]

The Refrain from "I Return"

"I return ...to the source of my creation
Opening ...to my place of transformation
Now I see ...love lives in me...

I return... to the glory of our oneness...
Flourishing... fearless, free... and fully conscious
Mightily... I stand and sing... I have returned."
So may we all. Amen.