

10/01/2021 Genesis 1:1-5 Baptism of Jesus Pastor Fraser Pearce

This is how the Book of Genesis,
And therefore the Bible as we have it arranged,
Begins: **In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth,**

When God created

Now I'm about to go on a bit of a theological wander
Before I go verse by verse through today's short reading
So please come along with me.

The first thing to keep in mind is that in the Old Testament
The word 'create' is used only of God.

In our Christian tradition

We recognise that it is God alone who has power to create
Out of nothing.

And we also recognise that we human beings are creatures of God
And therefore part of creation, and fellow creatures

With all that God has made

Whether trees, dogs, planets, stars, or angels.

So: we do not create ourselves

But, rather, God calls us to live in harmony

With the creation that he has spoken into being

And that he sustains by his word.

What's more, the whole wisdom tradition of the Bible

Has at its foundation the understanding that *creation is not God*

- and this is important for us to remember

When we hear teaching that suggests that God and creation
are the same thing.

Rather, on the basis of Scripture we understand

That God made, in his wisdom, all that there is

And that to live wisely is to recognise God's order in creation

And to live, as God's creatures, in harmony with it.

In our Lutheran tradition we have a memorable way
Of handing on teaching about creation.

In the Small Catechism

In the part dealing with the first part of the Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth

Luther wrote these words

That we receive and hand on to this day:

I believe that God has created me and everything that exists.

Now the Small Catechism is not an obscure part of our tradition

It is the basic teaching document that we use

Under the Bible, and with our hymn book

In teaching the Christian faith to young people

And to adults as they learn about our life together.

Again, when it comes to God as creator we teach

On the basis of Scripture

I believe that God has created me and everything that exists.

We recognise first of all that each one of us

Is created by God

We recognise that God is still at work in creation

And that we are, as individuals, spoken into being by God.

Now when I teach this to young people in Confirmation class

I ask them *how* God created them.

These are kids in year 8, and by that stage they are aware

that they were not delivered by a stork.

They understand, to their evident discomfort

- when they are asked to contemplate it -

That they were called into being by God

Through the earthy, fleshly, sexual union of their parents.

To my mind this earthy aspect of creation is worth keeping in mind.

That God works

through what could be called secondary causes

- even secondary causes

that can make us uncomfortable when we consider them -

Does not mean, from the point of view of faith,
that God is not absolutely involved
In bringing the universe, our galaxy, our solar system
Our planet, our land, our very bodies into being.

Of course we cannot prove using our senses
That it is God who has spoken creation into being
And who upholds it now with his powerful word
But as people who see God revealed especially in his Incarnate Son -
Who see God revealed especially in the life, the teaching, the signs,
the death, the resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus
Then we confess together that God is our Creator
And we receive creation as a gift from God
And we respond to his generosity with our thanks and praise

In fact, this is how the Small Catechism puts it
At the end of the treatment on creation: ***God does all this [that is,
gives his good gifts in creation] only because he is my kind and loving
Father; I certainly do not deserve it. All I can do is thank, praise, serve,
and obey him.***

This is, of course, what our liturgical life is about.
It's what the life that flows from our baptism
Our incorporation into the worship life of the church
And the life of love that flows from it
Is all about: thanking, praising, serving and obeying God
As we receive his gifts, especially in the liturgy
And as we show love for God in loving our neighbour.

Let's go back to the text

Again, this is how it begins: **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.**

Here the stage is set immediately for God to fashion and form
The Creation that he brings into being

God is about to order and to furnish the whole of his creation
And to give us a place in it

It is how God does this that stands out:

Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light.

God speaks, and things come into being

Theologians, taking up philosophical language

Call this God's *performative word*.

The main question at stake when God said 'Let there be light'

Is not what that word *meant*

But what that word *did*

It brought light into being

And this speaking into being

Sets the pattern for the whole creation account:

God speaks, and what he says happens

This, by the way, is worth keeping in mind

When you hear God's word spoken to you

Also in the liturgy.

When you hear the words that your sins are forgiven

Trust that this word is as performative as the one spoken in creation

That your sins are indeed forgiven

Or when you hear the words of Jesus

'This is my body, this is my blood

Given and shed for the forgiveness of sins'

Then trust that Jesus' word is performative

That he gives exactly what he says.

The text goes on: **And God saw that the light was good;**

Again, it's on the basis of texts such as this one

That we confess that God's creation is fundamentally good

Not just because we think it can be pleasant, or beautiful

Or even truly awesome

But because God says it is good.

To be sure, sometimes creation feels far from good
Not simply because there are diseases and natural disasters
But because nature seems to be red in tooth and claw:
And the whole of life can seem to be a pitiless survival of the fittest.

What's more our own bodily existence can be so problematic:
We look at our bodies and feel they are far from perfect.
More than this: We have desires, each one of us, that are disordered
And that can cause us distress or shame or confusion.
Now it is true that we Christians acknowledge that we live
In a fallen world, in a world that needs to be redeemed
And brought back into harmony and unity by God.

This is what we teach about

In the second and third articles of the creed
On Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

The fact is, as St Paul says, that

We groan, with creation, as we await the redemption of our bodies.

But this does not mean that creation itself is evil or bad.

Rather we confess with God

That creation, as God called it into being, is good.

This is important for us to keep in mind
When we hear teaching that downplays
the importance of the material world,
Or suggests that what is material is bad
And what is spiritual is good.

This is not how we understand things as Christian people

Rather, we confess with God that creation was made good by God
And that matter can be filled with God's Spirit.

We confess that in Christ – the word made flesh –

God is renewing and will renew creation

And is bringing and will bring even our bodies

into the life of the resurrection that Jesus lives.

Today's reading ends with these words: **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.**

In the creation narrative God brings order by his word
He names things as they are, as they have been ordered by him.
He demarcates time in the space that he creates.
This has led theologians, such as St Augustine, to consider
That God brings space and time together into existence.

However we may speculate, Scripture gives us the understanding
That God, in his wisdom
Makes, fashions, and furnishes creation.
He establishes the rhythms and harmonies of creation
And we, as his creatures, have our part in his grand symphony

In our Catechism we confess
I believe that God has created me and everything that exists.
Since we have a loving heavenly Father
Who has spoken us into existence
And who sustains us by his powerful word even now
Let us thank, praise, serve, and obey him.
In Jesus' name. Amen.