

“In the Beginning Was the Word”

Genesis 1:26-31

John 1:1-18

Genesis 1:1 – “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth.” Who did it? God. God created. When did God create? In the beginning.

When we read on in Genesis, we see earth as part of a universe that is hostile to life. In verse 2, “the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep.” It would require tremendous power to make an environment which would support life.

“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 wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.”

God did it. God created. It was a “wind from God that swept over the face of the waters.” God did it in phases or stages. No one knows how long it took. Some believe it was 6 – 24 hour days while others believe that each day symbolizes a very, very long time. We don’t know how long it took. But it did require tremendous power to create an environment which would support life. It required tremendous power to bring order out of chaos.

The prophet Jeremiah worried about God letting go and allowing everything to fall back into chaos because of human unfaithfulness in caring for God’s creation. In chapter 4, Jeremiah prophecies: “I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light. I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to

and fro. I looked, and lo, there was no one at all, and all the birds of the air had fled. I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins before the Lord.”

Jeremiah dreads a return to the chaos of creation and calls God’s people back to taking care of our relationships with God and with the earth. The prophets challenge us to restrain our wrong actions, to restrain our destructive tendencies and to remember our original purpose in Genesis 1. We are the climax of creation, created in the image of our Creator to govern creation on his behalf. It is a privilege to be created in God’s image, but with privilege comes responsibility. When we ignored our responsibility, God with great power, again took action.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without Him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in Him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.”

With great power, God again took action in the Word becoming flesh, in God becoming man to show us and remind us and teach us what God created us to be in the beginning. We were created in God’s image – a reflection of God’s own being and God was pleased with us.

But when it came time to fulfill our mission and purpose, when it came time to reflect God’s care for creation by exercising dominion and stewardship over the whole project – we failed miserably. And because we fail so often in fulfilling our mission and purpose, many see

our humanity as a curse and forget that God created us for his own “very good” purpose and created us for relationship with him.

But our humanity isn't the problem. Our sin is the problem. Our dehumanizing one another is the problem. Our not recognizing that every one of us is created in the image of God – is the problem. War turns people into targets. Lust turns people into objects of pleasure. Greed turns people into commodities to be bought and traded. Our sin dehumanizes one another and we get into trouble.

With great power, God took action in the Word becoming flesh, in God becoming man to show us and teach us what God created us to be in the beginning. Jesus revealed what it meant to be fully human as he taught his disciples how to love and serve and forgive and heal in all of their relationships. He called us back to our original purpose and mission of loving God and all of His creation.

By becoming human and by dying a human death on a cross, the naked and bleeding Jesus experienced the ultimate dehumanizing act on our behalf. In Jesus, God would go through the very death that ends human life. But then he would rise from the dead, defeating death and offering the amazing and wonderful hope that the curse of death, which now ends our humanity, will someday no longer be in the way of an eternal, resurrected, embodied, fully human life with God – the way it was meant from the beginning.

John writes in verse 4, “in him was life and the life as the light of all people.”

So how can we as individual following Christ and how can we as a church, as the Body of Christ in the world fulfill our original purpose and mission to love God, to love one another, and to care for all of His creation?

I'd like to share one example of how many of our young people in the E.L.C.A. are spending a year of their life as volunteers. Many of them, like Erika, are volunteering the year after graduating from college.

Erika Randall remembers that her time in Malaysia always began with a short walk under the hot sun (about 15 steps) followed by greetings (“Good morning, Teacher!”) and hugs from her students.

It was a quick commute to a job that was very far from home.

The 23-year-old from Minnesota taught English to children in Malaysia for a year as a young adult volunteer with the ELCA.

Her students, ages 6 to 13 years, eagerly soaked up their lessons. So did Erika, who considered herself as much a student as a teacher.

She gained some proficiency in Malay, the local language, with enthusiastic tutoring from the children in her classes.

Part of learning a new language, Erika discovered, was being open to the uniqueness of each person speaking the language and to the nuances of the culture that frame the words.

Taking that step asked Erika to engage in one-on-one relationships with her students – a task the Luther College graduate relishes.

“At first I had a difficult time teaching the students, and I think it was because we just didn’t get each other,” Erika confesses.

“I realized I had to really listen and really hear the children. I learned the hard way about the value of making relationships and getting to know people as individuals.”

Most important, Erika adds, is that “we grew together. I loved those kids! They taught me that patience and conversations are the most important characteristics in developing relationships, especially in a cross-cultural setting.”

Young adults are invited to challenge themselves through a year of international service with the ELCA. Visit www.elca.org/globalmission/youngadults to learn more.

Erika and other young adult Lutherans are learning what it means to follow Jesus toward our full humanity and the life God wants to live in us and through us. May we as the church, as the Body of Christ in the world fulfill our original purpose and mission to love God, to love one another, and to care for all of His creation.

May the peace of God . . .

#510 – Word of God, Come Down on Earth