

“Creating Partners”

Genesis 1-2:25, Matthew 28:16-20 & 2 Corinthians 13:11-13

Pastor James York

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If you want to spark a spirited debate ask Christians about creation. The views and interpretations are widely varied. Some of you will have very different perceptions of what God is telling us. Our scripture readings today should be discussed, prayerfully pondered, and approached with an open mind.

You may want to begin by deciding upon the purpose of the Bible. I view the Bible as a love letter from God to each of us. The Bible's purpose is to explain our relationship with God and reveal to us how to love. For those of you who are old enough to have written a love letter was your primary purpose sharing facts, giving a detailed account of history, or explaining the science of your love; or, was the focus expressing your love? When someone goes to the Bible for history or science, they are looking for something that was never meant to be expressed.

In Genesis, I perceive two different accounts of the creation that came from two tribes that were separate for generations. Each tribe has passed the oral story of creation to the next generation focusing on a different aspect of creation. The story was communicated in a form to aid in remembering and retelling. This is long before any written records, before calendars, before history, before science. Life mainly consisted of finding food and maintaining shelter. This was even before formal language. This story was told with few words, drawings in the dirt, hand shadows on the rock from a fire. After 10,000 or 5,000 years, we don't know; but, after more than 1,000 years Moses sought to write down the creation account. I believe Moses saw that each story revealed a different and insightful facet of God in relation to us, so Moses included them both side by side.

Imagine that you are hearing the story of the creation of the cosmos for the first time. Let go of your preconceived views. What is God revealing about Godself? What do we learn about love?

Genesis 1:1-2:3 “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 God called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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 God's image, in the image of God, God created them; male and female God 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 God had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that God had done, and God rested on the seventh day from all the work that God had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that God had done in creation.

If you heard this story in Hebrew the name used for God is Elohim (L-O-Heam) conveying the idea of a strong, mighty Creator. The next story names God as Yahweh conveying a relational God of love.

Genesis 2:4-25 “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there God put the man whom God had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then God took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man God made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.” Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.”

Pair up with someone. Each of you will have 30 seconds to share what resonated with you. Now the other person shares what resonated with them.

I heard God’s love creates goodness. We are God’s loved partners created to love and create goodness.

In the beginning the earth was a formless void, it was all darkness, chaos, random, disarray, confusion. God created order, light, and goodness. God created us to fill the cosmos

with love and to love God. In the story, there is a major additional detail that is only shared when God creates humans. God said, "Let 'us' make humankind in 'our' image." The 'us' and 'our' reveals God's love between the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, the loving Trinity. Each member of the Trinity perfectly loves and glorifies the other two members in perfect harmony. God's love is so amazing that God appears to be one. It is with that love that you and I are created. God hopes we will partner with God in creating the order and goodness of love everywhere. It is in this context that we are given dominion over all of creation. Dominion may be the most misinterpreted word in all of scripture. Dominion never means dominate, use, control, exploit, or abuse. Dominion means insuring the protection, wellbeing, rhythm, order, goodness, and harmony of all. Proper understanding of dominion is so important that it is repeated twice both times in relation to the loving triune nature of God. Wherever there is chaos, we are to lovingly create order. Wherever there is darkness, we are to lovingly create light. Wherever there is ugliness, we are to lovingly create beauty. Wherever something is wrong, we are to lovingly create goodness. We are created in the image of a loving God of harmony to partner in creating a cosmos of loving harmony. Regularly, we are to join God in rest savoring and celebrating the order, goodness, and love that God and we are lovingly creating.

Susanna Metz writes of God. "Love in love, existing in love, because of love and fired with the Spirit of Love. Love wanting nothing more than sharing Love with beloved creatures— blessing those beloved creatures with a love-infused creation that is beautiful beyond all measure".

Creation is an ongoing, growing, developing process. Creation is an inside out job. God works throughout and within creation lovingly persuading atoms and molecules to come together in order for the common good.

I like to get my science from scientist. The big bang and evolution seem to be the most likely way the cosmos has developed, at least until the next big breakthrough in science. I am not nearly as interested in the how as to the why creation happens and who started it all. These are the answers I find in Genesis.

In the second story we have the cosmos expanding and creatures evolving until the time was just right. Then, God breathed the Holy Spirit into humanity creating us. Loving relationships are throughout this story. We name everything. Ponder the great honor of naming a newborn baby. Hopefully this baby was created in love to be cradled with love to be set free in love to love. Again partnering with God, creating and providing loving care for all of the cosmos is emphasized. Man and woman are made from each other, for each other, as equals, partners, in perfect balance.

In the next chapter we have the fall, the sin of humanity. The symptoms are that man will now try to control and dominate woman, other men, and creation. Our desire to dominate destroys order, goodness, harmony, and love.

God continues to partner with us in creating goodness and love. Jesus came to clean up our mess, to calm storms, to heal disease, to mend broken relationships. Jesus came to reestablish harmony, equality, with everyone. It doesn't matter who you are, what you have achieved, how

much money you have, what you have done or have failed to do, God loves and cherishes each person equally. Jesus came to reveal God, to reveal love, to help us discover the image of God with us. Jesus came to remind us that, God's love creates goodness. We are God's loved partners created to love and create goodness.

The image of God, the three persons loving and glorifying one another, is God joining Godself to God's creation; and in so doing, elevating all of creation into the loving goodness of God's own life. The three persons of the Trinity are perfect unity, making it impossible to tell where one begins and another ends. We are created in that image to bring that loving unity among all people and throughout creation.

We are commissioned to join Jesus in lovingly creating order, goodness and unity. Matthew writes. **Matthew 28:16-20** "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw Jesus, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

We are to "go." The Greek here means "participate." We are to participate with God in lovingly creating order and goodness. We are to partner with God, as Jesus modeled, creating loving relationships with everyone. We are to go to the dark corners and participate with God lovingly shining light. We are to go where there is chaos and participate with God, lovingly providing order. We are to go wherever love is absent and participate with God creating love. We are to go wherever houses need repair and participate with God in repairing them. We are to go wherever someone is hurting and participate with God in healing them. We are commissioned to open ourselves to our loving creator, to let love permeate us, so we can participate with God in creating a good, orderly, loving cosmos.

The Apostle Paul's closing words to the Corinthians were. **2 Corinthians 13:11-13** "Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you."

We have come full circle back to lovingly creating order, living in harmony with each other, living in peace with everyone and the cosmos. We are to reveal the image, grace, love, and communion of our Triune God. God's love creates goodness. We are God's loved partners created to love and create goodness. Amen