

Faith Mennonite Church  
April 7, 2013  
"12 Scriptures"  
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## **Creation and Incarnation** *Genesis 1-2; John 1:1-17*

There has been a growing recognition across much of the larger church, of all denominations in recent years, that biblical literacy—a general knowledge of the Bible—is on the decline. A rather steep decline. One of the ideas that is being promoted within Mennonite Church USA is that congregations celebrate a “Year of the Bible” with special activities similar to the way we celebrate special anniversary years. One proposed activity, which a number of us participated in during the January adult education sessions was to identify and choose 12 scriptures that have been formative and that exemplify who we are and what we want to be as a faith community. We found it a challenging process to narrow things down to 12 so we have 3 sets of 12 scriptures, or 36. The list of these was included in the April newsletter.

During April and May we are planning our worship around the top 12 scriptures, matched with others from the top 36. Each Sunday you will find a post-it note in your bulletin. Just as we'll invite the children to draw a picture related to the text each Sunday, we also invite each of you to doodle, or note words or phrases that stand out for you from the scriptures, or songs, or sermons. There will be a moment of silence after the sermon, but you are free to write or doodle throughout the service. And during the offering time, we invite you to post your doodles/words on the stand in front.

In addition, during these 2 months, we hope that each of you will consider writing a reflection or a poem or create a drawing in response to a Bible verse or story that has been meaningful to you, perhaps at a pivotal moment in your life, or perhaps as a guiding word over many years. We'd like to put these together into some kind of collection, still to be determined.

Today we start at the very beginning....Genesis 1 and 2, the stories of creation, and John 1, the poetic prelude to the Gospel of John that weaves the story of creation with the coming of Jesus into the world.

Most every civilization and religion has some kind of creation story, some ancient memory and explanation of how the earth and we humans came to be. These stories date back to ancient, pre-modern times and therefore come to us not as scientific or historical fact, but as glimpses into the understanding and worldview of the communities in which they emerged.

As we experienced in the readings this morning, we in the Judeo-Christian tradition have two distinct creation stories just as we have 4 distinct gospels. They complement each other but chapter 2 of Genesis is not simply a continuation of chapter 1. Genesis 1 has a repetitive, poetic form, that imagines a premeditated, orderly creation. Genesis 2 portrays a more playful, experimenting God—as someone has described as “mucking in the mud”—moving and creating in response to each preceding act. We might think of Genesis 1 as a symphony and Genesis 2 as a jazz improvisation.

Although distinct in style, the two Genesis accounts share several themes. First, God brings order from chaos, life and form from emptiness, and God's spirit—God's breath—infuses everything that is made. God is at once outside, shaping the process, and within....breathing....lovingly entering into relationship with all that comes into being. The act of creation is an act of love and all that is brought forth is good, very good.

Second, creation and the creative process is relational. The God of Genesis 1 is a “we:” “Let *us* make humankind in our image, according to *our* likeness.” In this account, humans are brought forth in partnership, male and female. We reflect God in our relationality with one another and in the purposeful charge to care for the earth and to be nourished by the fruit of the earth.

This relationality is highlighted in a different way in Genesis 2 where the creation of the human in a singular form comes at the beginning, rather than the end of the process. In this account the human begins alone, in partnership only with God--tilling God's garden and giving names to the animals in the “wild kingdom” as God brings them forth. One imagines that this was not a bad existence, heady even—being a partner with God, even if

it's a junior partner! But the human is lonely. The human cannot enter into complete intimacy with God or with the other animals. The human needs another human for true, intimate encounter.

The English translation of the nature of this human relationship that develops in Genesis 2 when a partner is created, is that of “helper”: “I will make for the human a helper as his partner” ....”but for the human there was not found a helper as his partner” (vv. 18 & 20). In many parts of the church for far too long this word “helper” was skewed to mean that women were somehow less than men, meant to serve or be a helper in an inferior way. However, the Hebrew word that is translated as helper is *ezer*, which is a combination of two roots that mean “to rescue, to save” and “strength.” *Ezer* is used elsewhere in the Old Testament in reference to vitally important and powerful assistance and is most often used in reference to the help that God gives, as in the Psalm 46:1: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Thus a text that initially sounds male dominated to our modern ears, actually bears witness to a mutual relationship between the genders. Living into what it means to be in relationship with God and with one another will always contain a good bit of mystery, but we are born of relationship and we thrive in healthy, supportive relationships.

A third aspect of these stories is that creation is holistic and self-sustaining. In the first account, each different aspect of the natural order is given its own day of creation, emphasizing the importance of each part, yet each successive part is integral to the whole. Humans are tasked with the care of creation and at the same time are dependent on the creation for food. And then there is *rest*. We usually think of creation as the tangible things that are brought forth—water and land and plants and animals and humans. But the final, full day of creation is set aside for an intangible: rest. Rest for God! And God blessed that day and made it holy, sacred. This sacred rest is a vital element in the self-sustaining nature of the created order. If we do not take sufficient time for rest we hurt ourselves and we destroy nature. If God had time to rest than we most certainly do too. If we want to develop a more holistic and sustainable lifestyle, the first place to begin might just be in practicing Sabbath and resting.

And now we make a leap to John 1. But maybe not such a leap. For this beautiful passage majestically, yet simply binds Jesus to the very beginning. In Genesis chapter 1 we witness creation coming into being through God's word. “And God said” is repeated at each movement. This poem in John 1 identifies the Word, *logos*, as being one with God--no doubt the *we* of “Let *us* make humankind.” The writer of John interprets the coming of Jesus as a new act of creation: the Word of creation is speaking again, this time in the form of the man Jesus.

The Spirit/Word of creation doesn't simply breathe life into human beings and remain separate as in the first creation, but in a way that we will never fully understand, enters into the very flesh of the human experience in and through Jesus. “And the Word became flesh and lived among us” or in a literal rendering of the Greek: “The Word pitched tent and camped among us.” “And we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.” In the first creation, the human was lonely. In the coming of Jesus we can almost imagine that God is lonely, desiring to enter into our human experience.

The language of John 1 captures the language of the original creation: life and light. Throughout John's gospel we find a great deal of relational language, of father and son living in intimate communion. While this relationship is initially portrayed as that between Jesus and God, at the close of his life and in the resurrection account, Jesus tells the disciples that they are now his brothers and sisters, sharing in the same familial relationship with God.

No doubt the line from John 1 that many of us find most compelling and a constant word of hope is verse 5: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.” This is our Easter hope: that from the darkest moment of Jesus' death springs forth life. As Christians we are guided by a creation narrative infused with loving purpose, mutual relationship, and sustainable wholeness. And in the new creation brought about by God entering our humanity through Christ and carrying us through his death into new life, we live with the hope that everything around us is charged with the possibility of good.

Let us give thanks for the good creation that we participate in. Let us watch for new life, new light, pushing through the hard soil in our lives and all around us. Let us join God in saying each day: “It is good, it is very good.”