

A Poet's Vision of Creation
Genesis 1: 1-8; 31
Sept. 9, 2018

It's really important for us to get in touch with creation. As Brian McLaren reminds me as I listened to one of his podcasts, for so much of our lives we live in our little boxes. We wake up in our box spring beds; we sleep in a box called bedroom; we go into the box of our shower; we look into the box of our mirror; we go into the box of our closet to get some clothes; we go to our box of a kitchen and open the cupboards which are also boxes to get our box of cereal and bowl. The bowl and toilet bowl may be the only round things we have seen so far. Then we get into the box of our cars and drive to our work, which also may be a box, and some of us may even work in a cubical box where we may spend the day looking into the box of our computer screens. After work we get into our box of a car and drive home back to the box of our home where we sit and watch the box of our T.V screens. It's no wonder we feel boxed in. That is why, as Brian McLaren emphasizes, we need to connect with creation.

In the beginning God is how our bible begins. This poem was written at a time when the Jewish people lived among nations around them who had many gods. But this family of Abraham believed in one God who made everything. Most of the ancient cultures, each of which had their creation stories, spoke of everything being born out of chaos, conflict, and war between gods. In the biblical story the scene is one of peace and rest. The universe is not made fully formed. It was a formless void and dark. Space and Time are made as the starting place and over the darkness and silence the Spirit hovers, like a mother over her young. God's breath, or in Hebrew, ***Ruach***, hovers, like wind rippling over the water. The poet uses a beautiful image to describe this beginning:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

The general sense is that God was actively beginning the process of creation through his spirit/wind/breath. Furthermore, *ruach* is clearly a

feminine noun. God's *ruach* hovers and broods over the nest of creation, and as it germinates and begins to take shape, she guides and nurtures the process. It is a gentle relationship of the creator to creation: nearness and yet distance. God is not controlling, but *hovering over* the universe.

Then God created light. Here is the point where a supposed conflict between science and faith rises up. Science wants to explain the universe by reducing it into its parts. Through mathematics and equations they seek to reduce everything to its basic components. They want to explain things by dissecting and measuring. Bruce Coburn sings:

*You can't tell me there is no mystery, Mystery, Mystery
You can't tell me there is no mystery
It's everywhere I turn*

On the other hand the religious community comes to this argument in not very helpful ways. Many Christians feel that they have to defend the biblical account by putting the entire Genesis account into a scientific framework. They feel the need to read these opening chapters as literally true, almost as if it were a scientist explaining creation. But in the ancient world people didn't have science as we know it. They used songs, poetry, and art to give an account of the world. Their stories were their theories of how things began. So both science and religion have reduced these stories and argue about whether these stories are literal or not. This misses the point. Rather we need to listen to these poems and see how we fit into this creation. We need to allow God to speak to us in the language of poetry and images if we are to allow the creation story to shape our lives and prepare us to bow in humility before the Creator.

I read Curtis Gillespie's book, **Playing Through**. While this is a story about golf it is much more than that. It's about life, his life and how it intersected with family, golf, children, and the mystical geography of eastern Scotland.

Curtis Gillespie and Jack Marston are playing golf on the challenging Gullane number one course on the Lothian coast, about seventeen miles down from Edinburgh in Scotland. Curtis had been a student at St Andrews and on the varsity golf team in the late 80's. He has returned from Edmonton with his wife and two girls to live and write for a year in Gullane. Curtis and his good friend Jack, an eighty one year old, stood on the 7th tee that is the highest point on the Lothian

coast. On a fine day the view from this point is stunning. There before you lie the North Sea with its long stretches of sandy beaches and to the north the hills of Fife and the city of Edinburgh.

Curtis describes the effect on him: *The view flushed me to the core with light and space and colour...it was a spot of such majesty that time and again I tried to find adequate words for it and could not... Almost makes you believe in God, I said, looking ocean ward. Are you not religious, son? Jack asks. Jack goes on to tell Curtis that it was the war that destroyed any faith he had had before. Curtis goes on, I like to think there's something out there though...*

It's not so much that I believe in God. It's just that, well, I guess, I just hope that there's something else out there. I don't know what that is. But I think it would be, I don't know, a little depressing, if this, this world, great as it is, was it? You know what I mean?

Don't get sidetracked on logical problems of how there could be light when the stars and sun and moon weren't yet created. It's a visionary picture; it is like a poem seeking to give us a picture of this world that is unfolding. It's a poem of unfolding day by day, a process of creation in which each day God's speech brings things into being. A vibration comes out from God that causes ripples on the water and brings things into being. God's word gives permission for things to come into being. Let there be, the account says. God is not an engineer working in his factory. No, it is a poem of God's permission giving so that things are brought into being. It tells us how intimate God's relationship is to creation. God saw it and calls it by name. This interaction shows how well God knows the creation, understands it and pronounces it good. This is a beautiful poem that seeks to help us find our place in this world and to whom we are accountable.

Listen again to the song of the Psalmist: *O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. He goes on to sing: When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor (Psalm 8).*

Some might ask, but that's all well and good, but how does this old story of creation relate to my Jesus faith? Well, I'm glad you asked. That's why I included in our readings this morning the opening passage from John's Gospel. Remember how it goes? *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.*

John frames his Gospel of Jesus in the shape of Genesis one. This Word that was with the Father and the Spirit as they brooded over the vast universe of silence and darkness was Jesus, John proclaims. We read in the epistle to the Colossians these words: *for in him (Christ) all things in heaven and on earth were created...all things have been created through him and for him. (Col 1:15ff)*

The creation is a beautiful work of art that speaks to us of God's glory and God's delight in it. It was all good, the poet sings of God's response to what was made. Paul also reminds us that the creation speaks to us of God:

Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. (Romans 1:20)

To my mind the creation story and the reflections of the New Testament writers on its place in Jesus' redemptive work, ought to help us realize the importance of the material creation in God's plan. God's delight in creation as reflected in the Genesis account, the centre stage occupied by the resurrected body of Jesus in the New Testament, and the vision of a new creation: all this should help us realize just how fundamental the creation is for the Christian. None of us knows what this new creation will be like. What the poetic language and visions of the biblical writers tell us, however, is that heaven can never be thought of as a merely spiritual, bodiless existence. To all of this we can only sing: *O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

Amen