

## *Being Human or Playing God*

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Genesis 2:4 - 25

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### I.

Today is a day of beginnings.

As a congregation, we are launching a program year with new faith formation programs and worship opportunities for people of all ages.

We are also beginning an all-church read: Brian McLaren's "We Make the Road by Walking: A Year-Long Quest for Spiritual Formation, Reorientation, and Activation."

And, our scriptural text for today is found at the beginning of the Bible.

Not the very beginning of the Bible – we touched on that story last week.

In Genesis 1, God speaks into being earth and sky, sun and moon, halibut and heron, watermelons and oxen, even you and me, in God's own image.

When God was finished, God looked and saw that all of creation was very good, so God rested to enjoy everything God had made.

And God even gave a blessing to the time of resting.

Today's scripture is a second creation story and some biblical scholars think it predates the first.

In some ways, Genesis 2 flows from Genesis 1 – it is as if the narrative is saying, "Before we get ahead of ourselves, let's spend some more time back on the sixth day when humans were created."

Genesis 2 is a sort of meditation on the identify of this peculiar creature known as the human one.

But there is also a bit of narrative dissonance between the two stories.

In Genesis 1, God speaks and creation happens.

In Genesis 2, God forms 'adam out of the adamah, the human out of the humus.

Think of a sculptor or, better yet, a child at play, forming something out of the mud.

In Genesis 1, God creates everything, including all of the animals, as a way of preparing for humans, which are positioned as God's crowning achievement.

In Genesis 2, God creates the humble human from the humus, and then feels sorry for it, so God creates animals as potential companions.

In Genesis 1, God creates humanity as a partnership, male and female God creates them in God's own image.

In Genesis 2, God creates one human, then another out of the first.

It is clear, is it not, that we are dealing with two stories here, rather than one?

As Brian McLaren writes, two stories are better than one, for they represent a dialogue rather than a monologue, a variety of perspectives rather than a single imperial point of view.

In other words, our Bible is the collection of a conversation sustained over the course of a millennium.

## II.

In that conversation, Genesis 2 is a reflection on what it means to be human.

To be human means to be formed by God.

Interesting that Genesis 2 uses formed rather than created.

It's as if God created all of the raw materials, then used those raw materials – the dust of the earth – to form a human.

In other words, we are creatures of the earth, earthlings, earth-bound creatures.

This reminds me of the ancient wisdom of Native American spiritualities that emphasize the sacredness of earth and remind us humans that we remain a part of it.

Human destiny and the integrity of the earth are one in the same.

But humans don't come to life simply by being formed.

The text tells us that God breathed life into 'adam, into humanity.

Our translation says God "breathed into 'adam's nostrils the breath of life, and 'adam became a living being."

This detail can cause us to think about our own breath differently – when you breathe, you are breathing the breath of God which God breathed into humanity at the very beginning.

And then God plants a garden. Isn't that incredible?!

According to the Bible, God is a gardener who plants a garden and then places humanity in it.

And as a gardener, God coaxes out of the earth every plant that is beautiful and every plant that has good fruit to eat, and God makes sure there is a spring in the garden to water the plants.

What an amazing gardener and what an amazing garden!

What a joy and a blessing and a privilege to be put in such a place!

But God puts 'adam, puts humanity in the garden not just to loll around.

God gives 'adam its original vocation – to till and keep the garden.

We are created to be caretakers, stewards, organic farmers.

It's not hard work – the earth produces of itself – it's the work of paying attention, of tending to and enjoying the beauty of the garden.

Having given humanity its form, its breath of life, and its original vocation, God says go ahead and eat of every plant and tree in the garden, even the Tree of Life – McLaren calls it the “Tree of Aliveness” – and God says go ahead, the fruit is lovely and scrumptious and it will give you life.

Being human means being called to tend the garden, and to enjoy the fruit of the garden, and to experience the fullness of what it means to be alive.

But there is another tree.

This one is called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and of this tree God says, “You'd better not eat of it. That tree is just for me. You'd die if you ate that fruit. So just leave that tree be.”

In a garden of so much beauty and freedom and enjoyment, the presence of this other tree sticks out in the narrative.

As readers and interpreters of this story, it piques our interest like no other detail.

It would be like standing in a room with 10 doors, each a different color, and being told you can open any of the doors except for the pink one.

Well, why not?

Just don't.

Is the pink door locked?

No, just don't open it.

In this scenario, of all the doors, which one are you going to be most curious about?

The pink one.

Why even put a pink door in the room if you're not supposed to open it?

It's enough to drive a person mad.

### III.

The pink door in Genesis 2 is the called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It seems that the most dangerous thing in all creation – perhaps the only dangerous thing in all creation – is the knowledge of good and evil.

According to Genesis 2, that kind of knowledge is meant for God alone, God who forms all the creatures of the earth and is formed by no other.

When we start judging some aspects of creation as better than others, we start playing God.

As McLaren writes:

“If we humans start playing God and judging good and evil, how long will it take before we say this person or tribe is good and deserves to live, but that person or tribe is evil and deserves to die, or become our slaves?”

How long will it take before we judge this species of animal is good and deserves to survive, but that one is worthless and can be driven to extinction?  
How long until we judge this land is good and deserves to be preserved, but that river is without value and can be plundered, polluted, or poisoned?  
If we eat from the second tree, we will soon become violent, hateful, and destructive.”

In Genesis 1, God looked at all that God had made and called it good, even very good.

In Genesis 2, humanity eats of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

When we eat from the Tree of Aliveness, we live within the bounds of our creatureliness and we experience God’s care and provision and grace.

When we eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, we start playing God, and we experience the world as threat and “we create in ourselves the very evil we claim to detect in others.”

Playing God, we create anxiety and greed and bigotry and distrust and gossip and protectiveness.

According to the Bible, these things come from the second tree.

All of the good things in life come from the first tree.

Being human means holding a fruit in each hand. Each piece has a bit taken out of it. Every day we get to decide which one we are going to continue eating.

#### IV.

What this mean for us as a congregation as we launch our program year?

In the sermon on the mount, found in Matthew 6, Jesus looks at his disciples and the crowd and says, “Don’t worry about your life.”

With these words, he is putting them back in the garden.

“God will provide for you,” he says.

“Look at the flowers and the plums and the tomatoes and the hummingbirds and the wasps.”

They’re doing their thing, tending and tilling their little part of the garden.

Fully alive because they are fully themselves.

Even Solomon - gaudy, self-involved, golden King Solomon - in all his splendor, is not decked out like a single one of these garden dwellers.

Trust in God to provide what you need and what your neighbor needs and what the world needs.

Eat the fruit that it is God’s good pleasure to give you.

Trust in the ultimate goodness of creation, and leave the judgment of good and evil to God, who continues to guide and to provide, to curb and to instruct, to create and to destroy, to pluck and to plant.

Our work is to tend and to till, to care and to companion, to be washed in the waters of the river of life, to eat at the table of abundance, and to choose again today the way of aliveness.

Look at your hands... God will use these hands to share tenderness.

Look at your feet... God will use these feet to create new paths.

Close your eyes and look at your heart... God will use this heart to fill the world with love.

Open your eyes and look at the cross... Here God meets and embraces the world.

Look around you at God's world... This is where we are sent to serve.

This is what it means to be human. Amen.