



Goodness



A Sermon By

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June 11, 2017

Grace Episcopal Church

Silver Spring, Maryland

An audio version of this sermon can be found on the Grace Church website at
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-06-11-AAA.mp3>.

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Grace Episcopal Church
Trinity Sunday
June 11, 2017

Genesis 1:1-2:4a Psalm 8 Matthew 28:16-20

“In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth ...” The opening words of the creation account in the first chapter of Genesis are familiar to many people. These words and the story that follow are probably one of the most familiar stories from the Hebrew Bible. As with anything that becomes overly familiar, it is easy to miss the wonder of this well-known scripture passage. Familiarity can breed indifference. The wonder of this story is also challenged by the friction the account has caused over the years, prompting heated discussions about evolution, intelligent design, creationism, and the big bang. But for the next few minutes, I ask you, to set those images and concepts aside as we look at the text. The ancient Israelites didn’t fathom the concept of evolution, as we know it. So, with our preconceived notions about this text set aside momentarily, I invite us to explore our Genesis reading as a literary whole; seeking what it might say to us as followers of Christ today.

First and foremost, this account highlights God's care for the cosmos and its human inhabitants. God is portrayed as speaking from afar, bringing order out of chaos in a well-planned and carefully structured progression of six days of creation.

On the first day, God creates light to separate the day from the night. On the second day, God creates a dome called Sky to separate the waters above and below the dome. On the third day, God divides the dry land from the waters of the seas, so that the earth can bring forth vegetation to grow and to replenish itself. On the fourth day the celestial lights are set in the sky to order the days and nights, as well as to be signs for the seasons. On the fifth day, sea creatures and birds are created with God’s blessing to thrive and multiply. Then the other living creatures of every kind are added to the earth on the sixth day. Also on this day, God creates humans as a simultaneous community, male and female, both fully in the image of God. When God blesses them, the humans are given dominion over all creation to insure its protection and wellbeing without exploitation or domination.

God repeatedly pronounces the results of the six days of creation as "good" and the whole creation in the end as "very good". With God’s first work of creation finished; God rested on the seventh day and “hallowed” it. From this we learn that God is the Lord of all creation—the God of order who makes all things good. God is sovereign and powerful. God says, and it happens. God is one. God is powerful. God creates and creation is good. This opening passage of our Bible constitutes the essence of good news. And it is good, so good in fact that, the author tells us every few lines just how good it all is.

This passage is usually read at the Easter Vigil service. On my first Easter Vigil at Grace the lector read this passage so eloquently that it strikes me still. When she came to the phrase, “and God saw that it was good,” she put a gentle, but distinct emphasis on those words. She lit them up with her voice and the careful way she said them. Words, that in my personal reading I often glossed over, became tools that helped me recognize, in a new way, just how much beauty and goodness

God endowed creation with. And God saw that it was good. These words are powerful. They affirm for us that in God's eyes, creation is good. In God's eyes, we are good.

Have you ever thought that about yourself? I am good. Not in a self-righteous or arrogant way, but in an honest way, a way that affirms the dignity within you? You are good. In the beginning, God created. Grace and beauty flowed from the hand of God—light and dark, water and earth, animals and vegetables, energetic life and peaceful stillness, and humanity. And it was all very good. You are God's beloved creation, made in goodness and made for goodness. You have the print of the Creator within you and on you. You are beautiful, you are whole, you are good.

Yet, all too often, we are led to believe that the opposite is true. Culture, society, sometimes family and friends knowingly or unknowingly make us feel that we're not good enough. We're not what we should be. We should be doing more. We should be doing better. Of course, we all fall short. No one is perfect. But never for a minute believe the lie that you are not good or cared about or loved deeply. The very first words in the Bible affirm how pleased God is with creation. They affirm how good creation is. There is nothing we can do or say to prove those words wrong. You are good.

But goodness does not mean infallibility. We all fall short of what we are call to be and do. We mess up. We make mistakes, some more grievous than others. We hurt one another. We fail and we fall. We exploit the dominion God has given us over all creation. We fail to protect. In fact we misuse it and one another. We sin, grievously. But still, at the core of our being, our nature is one of goodness. God loves us with a fierce and deep and passionate love from the beginning until this very day, and beyond.

14th century Christian mystic, Julian of Norwich, once had a vision of creation that she shared in her book *Showings*. She writes, "And he showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand. I looked at it and thought: What can this be? And I was given this general answer: It is everything which is made. I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that it was so little that it could suddenly fall into nothing. And I was answered: It lasts and always will, because God loves it, and thus everything has being through the love of God. In this little thing, I understood three things. The first is that God made it, the second is that God loves it, the third is that God preserves it." God made creation, loving it into existence and deeming it good, and God safeguards creation, sustaining us with the same life-giving spirit that moved over the waters in the dawn of time.

There are times when this doesn't seem true. When violence and indifference seem so prevalent that it's difficult to believe that goodness is at the foundation of our world. But it is. At the core of all things. And it isn't just at the core. God didn't create and step back to see what would happen next. God has been present throughout the entire course of history from the beginning to this very moment. And God is with us and creation still. In our focus on Genesis, let us not forget the last words of our Gospel text this morning. "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

God created and God more wonderfully restored creation through Jesus Christ and the gift of the Spirit. You are good. Created by a loving God who works goodness in and through you as much now as on the day you were formed. That God is with you always, seeking to remind you of your

goodness and God's goodness. Let this message today be a reminder. No matter what is happening in the world, no matter what is happening in your life, you are good. You are valued. You are loved. You are precious to God, and precious to this community. Know this, remember it, share it with others. Amen.