

June 5, 2016  
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**Maker of Heaven and Earth**

Genesis 1:1-5  
Second Presbyterian Church, Baltimore

First of all, I give thanks for the works of Barbara Brown Taylor, a now retired Episcopal Priest, whose approach to this very familiar text I have adapted for this sermon today. Her literary creativity is a blessing and a wonder. So let's get started.

If birds could write books, then their story of creation would doubtless read differently from ours. In the first place, we would expect that birds would make quite a lot out of the 'wind of God' that swept over the face of the waters in the beginning of creation. When we humans read "wind," we know what it feels like on our faces, when it blows our hair around and pushes on our bodies, but not many of us have a clue what it is like *not* to feel the wind because you are *in* it—moving at the same speed and in the same direction.

Birds *love* the Bible verse from John's Gospel..."The wind blows where it chooses,



and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes."

In the bird book of creation, sea creatures would probably still arrive as the first creatures, on day five—the pelicans would insist on that.

Land creatures would still come next—mice, chipmunks, goats, camels, cattle, humans,—things like that—earthbound creatures, you know?

For the birds, the flying squirrels

were pretty advanced, mountain goats had a leg up, but humans—well, not so much. For the birds, it was really just pitiful watching them try to do what birds were just made to do—jumping off rocks, flapping their arms wildly.

Sometimes when the humans slept, inquisitive birds could see their limbs twitching, as if they were dreaming of flight. None of this was their fault, of course. Bird mothers taught their children never to make fun of humans. "God made them that way," the mothers said, "the same way God made you. Now go outside and fly."

But day six —that was the day to get excited about when the book of creation was read in Bird Church — the day God created birds in his image—in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them—sparrows, ravens, wood ducks, and orioles—whooping cranes, turtle doves, mockingbirds, blue jays and cardinals—all of them different and yet all of them alike, with two eyes, one beak, and those two marvelous *wings*—their daily assurance that they were made in the image of their Creator.

This was not just God's gift to them. It was also God's call — to look after the sea creatures and the land animals as God would look after them —especially the humans, who seemed in particular need of help.

Humans *knew* about God's wings, at least. They were not entirely oblivious to the order of creation. Sometimes, when they read from their own book, you could hear this wisdom as clear as a bell.

"Guard me as the apple of the eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings," they read from the Psalms.

And, "Be merciful to me, O God, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge."

You couldn't read passages like this without understanding that God was a bird—the Great Bird—who had made everything and called it good, but who had loved birds **so much** that God gave them wings?



So of course the birds were glad to do what they could for others in the created order—waking people up in the morning with sweet songs, entertaining children with their aerobatics and pretending to like the gummy white bread the children fed them down by the pond. *Akh, akh.*

Sometimes, under special order from God, the birds made bread deliveries of their

own to humans in the wilderness. Ages ago, a flock of them even volunteered to become food themselves, when a whole crowd of people, wandering in the desert, said they were dying of hunger. The quail gave their lives to feed them— but really, what are you going to do when you are the only creatures in all of creation made in the image of God? You love as God loves, right? You love *what* God loves, because that is what your life is for.

In re-reading the first chapter of Genesis this week, over and over, for the first time I noticed something new, taking place on day six.

I thought that we human beings had day six all to ourselves— you know, the pinnacle of the story— God's last, best word of creation. With all lesser creatures out of the way, the sixth day finally arrived.

Then I noticed for the first time that day six does not start there, with humans. Day six starts two verses earlier, with the creation of land animals — cattle, to be exact. The text doesn't mention any other animals by name *except* cattle—twice in fact, along with unspecified creeping things (Terrapins, for sure) and wild animals.

Now we don't have day six to ourselves anymore, just us humans. All of us are sharing it with *cows*, which I like well enough, but don't exactly see on a par with humans; sorry. Then I recall how valuable cows were in the ancient world—like buffalo for Native Americans—one single animal that provided milk, meat, hide and even droppings for the fire. And then there is the book of Jonah, with the most interesting last line in the whole Bible: "**And, (the Lord said), should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many cattle?"**

Still, it might be a real comedown—a reminder that while God may have made human beings for special purpose, we were not made of any more special stuff than the rest of creation. We were made on the same day as cows and creeping things and wild animals of every kind.

God gave us dominion, but God did not pronounce us *better* than anything else that God had made. All creation was made and blessed. "God saw everything that had been made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day."

So what I've learned in my re-reading Genesis are a couple of very basic things. If God is the Maker of Heaven and Earth, of sea creatures, of birds who fly in the sky above, cattle of all kinds and us, too, then our lives are really not our own. We belong to God.

We depend on God for every breath we're given, for having our arms and legs and brains, too. It all belongs to God. We all belong to God.

If we believe that God is the maker of all things, and thus is the true owner, then it becomes our privilege to loosen our grip on what we think is our own, and discover that real joy comes in what we share and how we share it.

And if God is truly the maker of heaven and earth, then we never have a reason to lose hope. God did not just make the earth and stop at that. God made the earth, the skies, the heavens above and the eternity we now live into, as we have been given the hope, promise and Spirit of Jesus, Lord and Savior of all.

And if you think all of that is for the birds; well, you might just have something there. Made in the divine image, we are here to love as God loves.

So get ready to receive the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation, each and all, for we are all the spitting image of the One who gives life for all. Amen.

