

(Remembering 15 years ago today, let us take a moment of silence to reflect and pray for those whose lives were affected, and continue to be affected, one way or another, by the events of this day, in NYC, Washington DC, Shanksville, PA, & around the world...)

September 11: 'Pass it On: All Things New' Genesis 1:26-31

It all started long before us, of course, eons before any of us were here, built into the foundation of creation. It's all about life, ongoing around and inside us. Creation is not just what happened once upon a time, long, long ago, but what continues to happen, in, with and around us. We call it creation, but its not all past... it is part of who we are... and who we are becoming, as children of God.

This morning is part two of our Sermon Series "Pass it On"; it's all about what we share together in common, in equal amounts — given us by God.

Built into the story of Creation, deeper than we know- is a confirmation of the goodness God has given us and is built into our lives, in ways we recognize and celebrate as well as mystical and mysterious too. We can recognize this in the Biblical story of creation itself, in our individually created lives, and in our common life, created to be together.



Most scholars believe that the first chapter of Genesis, some words of which we've already shared together, was the last section of the Pentateuch, the Five Books of Moses, to be formally written down. Genesis is the youngest of the first five books of the Bible, written just after the fall of the Babylonian Empire, as the priests and people returned to Israel after being held captive in exile for 50 years.

The Genesis authors, priests who had been Babylonian exiles, compiled generations of age old oral tradition to write the text. In the passage we encounter God and God's creating word.

Having now returned to the land of Israel, the Hebrews could freely announce God's sovereignty and goodness, declaring that all humanity is created with the call and the capacity to exercise dominion, granted by God.

They were not merely saying that each part of God's creation was very good, but rather that God's mighty web of interconnected relationships was deeply good, relationally good, abundantly good! And the relationship between humanity and life itself was very, very good. (Get the point here, for emphasis?) It is utterly good that humanity is made in the image of God, each soul both carrying inherent dignity and the call and capacity to steward (to harness and nurture) the creation. It is beautifully good that the Lord provided for the needs of all creation in a web of relationships that overflowed with forceful goodness.

It is an important part of our Reformed tradition to acknowledge this as part of our statement of faith; that God wants us to see and understand God's role as continuing Creator, and for us to live our lives in a similar manner. In John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he writes "*God revealed himself and daily discloses himself in the whole workmanship of the universe. As a consequence we cannot open our eyes without being compelled to see him.*" Later he adds, "*upon God's individual works has been engraved unmistakable marks of his glory, so clear and so prominent that even unlettered and stupid folk cannot plead ignorance as an excuse.*"

Calvin compares God's revelation in Creation to "*a sort of mirror in which we can contemplate God, who is otherwise invisible.*"

Modern culture has taken this to heart, and we see God's good and providential handiwork wherever we turn.

One view of this that has caught popular imagination is the account that every seven years we essentially become new people, because in that time every cell in our body has been replaced by a new cell. You've heard that before, right? Don't you feel younger than you were seven years ago? (Well, maybe it doesn't

quite work like that...)

But it's true that individual cells have a finite life span, and when they die off



are replaced with new cells. As a brief article in the New England Journal of Medicine notes, "There are between 50 and 75 trillion cells in the body. Each type of cell has its own life span, and when a human dies it may take hours or days before all the cells in the body die." (Forensic investigators take

advantage of this morbid fact when determining the cause and time of death of homicide victims.)

Red blood cells live for about four months, white blood cells live on average more than a year. Skin cells live about two or three weeks. Colon cells die off after about four days. Brain cells typically last an entire lifetime."

There's nothing special about a seven-year cycle, since cells are dying and being replaced all the time. The point is that just as the earth revolves around the sun without our having to lift our pinkie, there is also an ongoing, life-giving, renewing process going on inside us all the time, whether we know it or not.

The Presbyterian author Fred Buechner puts this phenomenon in a different, more reflective light when he wrote these words: "Using the same old materials of earth, air, fire, and water, every twenty-four hours God creates something new out of them. If you think you're seeing the same show all over again seven times a week, you're crazy. Every morning you wake up to something that in all eternity never was before and never will be again. And the you that wakes up was never the same before and will never be the same again either." (Wishful Thinking)

Evidence of the presence of the Kingdom of God is strong wherever and whenever people live by God's promise that there is more to this world— and more to this life— than just what we see.

A few years ago on my sabbatical, I spent some time with the Scottish Pastor & theologian Philip Newell... He was teaching about the great Celtic teachers of

the middle ages, (as he often does) and about Creation. His words, and stories, came back to me this week. The most truthful teaching of the Creation story is that it reminds us all of our deepest identity, the core of who we are made to be, each of us of God. Each of us is made of the essential nature of God, reinforced in the phrase repeated after each day in the creation story... “And God saw that it was good, and God saw that it was good; and God saw all that had been made and it was very good.”

Creation is not simply something that happened once in the past; it is forever being born, out of the Womb of the Eternal (as Newell puts it); God forever beholding what is being born as sacred, including us.

Not only is creation good, arriving through God’s self, but if goodness was to be extracted from the universe, all things would cease to exist and collapse upon itself.

God’s very goodness is in itself the source of all life, ever expanding, ever creating and re-creating.

Goodness is not simply a feature of life; it is the very essence of life, and we are invited to join in the celebration of life.

Modern Science has discovered just how deeply we as human beings are stitched into the fabric of the natural order of all living things. Biblical stories declared long ago that this world and everything in it find its unity in God - the source of all that is.

If we have learned anything from our common human history it is that the recognition of the essential dignity of every human being cannot be taken for granted, but rather has to be reaffirmed again and again. If it is not affirmed, it will be taken away.



A final word. The author, Calvin Trillin, in his book, *About Alice*, relates a story about his wife, Alice, and about the *Secret of Life*. She

was volunteering at a camp for terminally ill children. In the course of the camp, Alice had befriended a young girl who was severely disabled. The little girl's name was Lucy. One afternoon, Lucy was absorbed in a game with the other campers and their counselors. Standing nearby, Alice noticed a piece of paper lying on the ground. Apparently, with all the activity of the game, it had slipped out of someone's pocket.

She picked it up. In trying to figure out who it belonged to, she opened it and discovered it was actually a letter. It was a letter to Lucy from her parents.

She could not help but read the first few lines:

"Dear Lucy, if God had given us all the children in the world to choose from, we would only have chosen you."

Calvin Trillin goes on to say that Alice immediately passed the note on to a young counselor who was standing nearby and said, "Quick, read this. It's the secret of life."



Indeed. That we are "made in the image and likeness of God" is at the heart of the story that discloses the secret of life. And it is good, very good, for each and every one of us- to be shared as

generously as God gives us the power to share. This is the good news. This is the very good news of the gospel; and it's worth Passing On, don't you think?

Thanks be to God. Amen.