

Genesis 1: 24- 2:4 “The Verb-ness of God” Rev. Janet Chapman 6/11/17

When Mikayla was about 5 years old, we went to visit my ex-husband’s parents in Florida attending their Southern Baptist mega-sized church. I was informed that going to Sunday School is often more important than worship, so we all went together – John was ushered off to the men’s class, I was escorted off to the women’s class, and Mikayla went to the kindergarten class. Trying not to come unglued at the necessity to segregate by gender, I excused myself and said I would stay with Mikayla for awhile just to make sure she would be alright. Never was I more pleased to have a child as an excuse to avoid such archaic learning styles. In the kindergarten class, the teacher was introducing the story of creation. One kid groaned saying, “But that is boring, can’t we do something else?” I felt sorry for the teacher who politely ignored the child and kept going. Having shared the first creation story from the children’s Bible, she asked the kids if they had any questions about how God created us. The same little boy raised his hand and said, “My dad said we come from monkeys.” Without missing a beat, the teacher replied, “Let’s talk about your family problems later.”

There is nothing boring about the story of creation, and not just because of the whole evolution controversy. We in the Christian Church believe that God and science worked together, in partnership, rather than being at odds with each other. What that little boy had somehow missed in the creation story, however, was the absolute miracle and majesty of it all. It is a real miracle that anything exists at all, and that we get to be part of it. On this fascinating and surprising fact, the first pages of the Bible and the best thinking of today’s scientists are in full agreement. It all began in the beginning, when space and time, energy and matter, gravity and light, burst or bloomed or banged into being. Using the poetry style of Genesis, we might

say that the possibility of this universe overflowed into actuality as God, the Creative Spirit, uttered the original joyful invitation: Let it be! And in response came light, time, space, matter, motion, sea, animal, fish, sparrow, you, me and so on. All of us enjoying the unspeakable gift and privilege of being here, of being alive.

The story is not science in and of itself, it is not history, but it is poetry that expresses joy, wonderment and awe in creation. It confesses full trust in God's power and authority as God's speaking is both active and action-orientated. The Creator brings it all into being, and now some 14 billion years later, here we find ourselves: dancers in this beautiful, mysterious choreography that expands and evolves and includes us all. Don't we all feel like poets when we try to speak of the beauty and wonder of this creation, when we look at the beauty of Mt. Shasta and Lassen, when we watch the thunderclouds come rolling in, or see the intricate shape of rose and smell its scent? It turns us all into poets when we look up at the stars on a dark night and feel the beyond-words awe of space in all its vastness, when we look out from the beach toward the sunrise or sunset and savor the saturate, pregnant silence, when we experience that moment of "ahh" or "ooo" or "hallelujah" praising the God who made it all possible.

The story behind such amazement is found in Genesis 1 & 2, with the word Genesis meaning beginnings. There are actually 2 creation stories in Genesis, the story of Adam and Eve, and the story found in chapter one through verse 4 of chapter 2. This latter story of which we heard a portion of today is probably the last section of Genesis to be written, at around 500 BC, when there was a great deal of chaos and darkness going on which would make one very appreciative of some divine order. The story is, as Penelope Duckworth notes, the story of

creation par excellence. There are no other issues interwoven here such as sin or the “fall,” simply an image of God as creating, calling a world into being piece by piece, putting disorder into order and then affirming the goodness of it all. However, the story we find in chapter 2 was written before chapter one and delves more deeply into the Garden of Eden offering a distinctively different order of what was created when. What this shows us is that there were two stories people told about how the world came to be the way it is, and that those who pulled the papers together didn’t feel called upon to choose one over the other. That is how they approached this project of the Bible, not as a journalistic compilation of historical fact but as a statement of important truth. Two truths were twice as true as one, to their way of thinking, and so they left us both stories from which to glean. In the Hebrew scriptures and throughout Genesis, we experience deep, multi-layered poetry and wild, ancient stories that reveal deep truths helping us to be more fully alive even today. They dare to proclaim that the universe is God’s self-expression and activity where all matter really does matter. That activity hasn’t stopped either, because God goes on creating and re-creating. The theologian Mary Daly once asked, “Why indeed must ‘God’ be a noun? Why not a verb... the most active and dynamic of all?” I like that thought – God as a verb, God as action and activity rather than distant, stagnant, and uninterested in creation. Such a view contrasts with those who claim God is like some Deist clockmaker who set the whole, whirring machine into motion many years ago and then retired. They are more likely to claim we have no need for God now that things are going along pretty well. When the machine doesn’t work just right, someone secures a government grant to find out why, and when they do, they decide they’ll fix that too.

A story is told of a group of scientists who got together and decided they had come a long way and no longer needed God. So they picked one scientist to go and tell God as much. The scientist walked up to God and said, "God, we've decided that we no longer need you. We're to the point that we can clone people, communicate with and travel to outer space, correct the ozone layer, and create all that is needed for survival, so you can just move along." God listened very patiently and kindly and when the man was done, said, "Very well, how about this. Let's have a human-making contest." The scientist said, "Ok, great!" But God added, "Now we're going to do this just like I did back in the old days with Adam and Eve." "Sure, no problem," said the scientist, and bent down and grabbed himself a handful of dirt. God looked at him and said, "No, no, no – you've got to go get your own dirt!" It is when science and God are partnered together hand in hand, not at odds with one another, that we come to understand our fragility and vulnerability. The wrong virus gets loose, a certain insect appears for where there is no insecticide, technological improvements cause unintended hardships and we are reminded that we live only a step or two from disaster. I don't know if we need to be so dramatic, however, I do know that I have sat at way too many bedsides and in living rooms and prayed with folks who one moment were in the midst of dreams come true and the next were battling the unthinkable. Our lives float, just barely sometimes, over the chaos. But the good news is that God brings order out of chaos.

"Cancer," according to Time magazine, "is basically the normal reproductive processes of the body gone crazy for some strange reason. Normal cells go crazy, normal cellular checks and balances malfunction and the destruction begins." Doesn't this also sound like how some folks might describe the onset of chaos in their lives? Sure it is a beautiful summer Sunday

today, but what happens when the chaos bubbles up and the mountains shake and the sea roars? The midlife crisis, the screech of brakes and the crash, the note from the boss... into every life, a little chaos comes. And what then? Our allegedly orderly, whirling, efficient, natural-law-abiding machine isn't much comfort to us then.

In such times, we turn and remember the story, "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. The earth was without form and void...and God said, let it be," and the chaos was conquered. The verb-ness of God has not ceased but continues to diminish the chaos. God continues to create, in partnership with us, a new thing. It is the verb-ness of God who works continuously in the chaos and in our very lives so that creation might be saved, so that one day we who are created in God's image might all say as one, "it is very good." So, in times of chaos, when your somethingness is in danger of being overswept by the nothingness, imagine the verb-ness of God bending into your world, like a mother bending over her baby, birthing, forming, and caressing you with the joy of poetic artistry. For in the beginning, God created. In the end, God creates. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.