

Sermon for Sunday, June 4, 2023
First Sunday after Pentecost - Holy Trinity Sunday
“Creation Stories”
Reverend Amy Zalk Larson
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved People of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Our Bible was forged from a crisis of faith. That’s how one of my favorite authors describes the formation of the Hebrew Bible which is also known as the Old Testament. *Forged from a crisis of faith*, writes the late Rachel Held Evans in her book, *Inspired*.¹ Held Evans also imagines a night in a Jewish home long ago, a night that reveals more about that crisis of faith, and why it led the Jews to narrate the creation story that we just read together. I’ll share an abbreviated description of this imagined night.²

The Sabbath is about to begin. It’s time for the family to gather and remember God’s goodness. Except tonight, the family’s teenage son, Haggai, is late. Mama and Papa are getting worried and frustrated. Sabbath has always been important but it’s essential in these times. It reminds the family that they are God’s people, a truth that’s hard to claim these days. Once their people had a beautiful temple, a king, and a great expanse of land. But then the ruthless Babylonians destroyed it all. Now their people must live in exile in Babylon and serve their conquerors. Sabbath helps them remember a power greater than Babylon.

But Haggai is late. When he finally bursts into the house, he can’t contain his excitement. *I heard the most amazing story!* he exclaims, and then launches into a violent tale about the creation of the world, one he’s heard on the streets of Babylon. *In the beginning there was just chaos*, Haggai declares. *The gods began to fight and then there was a huge battle between the god Marduk and his grandmother, the god Tiamuk. Marduk won and used the remains of Tiamuk’s body to order creation. He got everything under control, with him on top of it all. He created humanity from the blood of his enemies so that humans could serve the gods. The King is his emissary.*

When Haggai is finished narrating this tale, he bows. The house is silent. Finally, after a long pause, Papa invites the whole family to gather around him. *I have a story too*, he says, a twinkle returning to his eye, *one passed down from my father and his father and his father before him. Listen carefully.* Papa then tells a story like the one we just read together from Genesis. Papa’s tale shares elements with the Babylonian creation story and yet paints a very different picture of God, creation, and humanity.

There was chaos in the beginning, but the Spirit of God was moving over the waters. Then God spoke and creation began. No great battle between the gods, no grandmothers killed. God brought order through life giving words, not domination. God created all people in God’s image, all are charged with watching over creation. All people are God’s emissaries, not just the King. None are to be slaves. When Papa finishes, Haggai is reflective. He apologizes for being late for Sabbath. Papa tousles his hair and forgives him.

¹ *Inspired: Slaying Giants, Walking on Water, and Loving the Bible Again*, by Rachel Held-Evans. Nashville: Nelson Books, 2018, p. 7

² *Ibid.* p. 1-6.

The Genesis 1 creation story was forged as the Jewish people struggled to hold on to and pass on their faith during a time of exile. Our questions and struggles are different now, yet this creation story still speaks to them. Everything can feel chaotic, yet the Spirit of God moves over the chaos and orders the chaos with the Word. God can handle chaos. We often despair that anything can ever change, yet God speaks and things happen, life emerges, and it is good. We feel driven by ruthless task masters: the clock, the bottom line, the market, deadlines. Yet God takes time at the end of each and every day to reflect, to notice, to celebrate the goodness of what's happened.

I love this aspect of this creation story. At the end of each day, God doesn't say, *Oh, I only got the land done, I should have done the plants and trees too.* No, God delights in what's been done, taking time to savor. It would be good for us to do the same at the end of each day. Years ago, I was encouraged to find at least three reasons to be grateful each night. Some days I'm just grateful that the day is over, but that counts! *Evening came and then morning.* A new day is coming.

This story also speaks to our loneliness and isolation. We have a God who is relationship at God's core: One God, who is also three - God the creator, God the life-giving Word, God the Spirit. The three persons of the Trinity have been in a life-giving, self-giving dance since before the world began. And God has made room for us in this dance. God says, *now we will make humans, and they will be like us.* We are all made in God's image. Every single person is of God and can help us to know more of God.

In this time of climate change, this story proclaims that we are all responsible for what God creates. We are all charged with watching over and tending to creation each day, in big ways and small. The creation story in Genesis 1 is a story we need today. It isn't the only creation story in scripture. There are actually around 20 depending on how you count. They all describe creation differently, especially the first two creation stories in Genesis. Which one is true? All of them are.

Our culture tends to think something is true if it can be proven by a scientific experiment or if it actually happened the way it was written. Yet there is truth that is beyond fact, beyond proof, truth that tells us who God is and who we are. These are mysteries that cannot be explained. They can only be experienced through stories, experienced in our bodies and our lives.

The same is true of the Trinity. We can't explain how God is one and yet three. So, we gather to hear the stories. We gather to encounter and be in relationship with our good God. As we do, we are reminded of a power greater than rulers, greater than chaos, greater than the isolation, greater than the ruthless task masters of our day, greater than all that causes us to despair.

We encounter God who continues to create, redeem, and sustain us each new day.