

July 5, 2020 • In-Home Communion • Online Worship

“Six Great Bible Stories: Foundational”

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris



Genesis 1:1-3, 14-19, 27-28a

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.

And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day. So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them.

This morning I am beginning a series on six great Bible stories from the Book of Genesis, the Book of Beginnings, as it is called. I want us in this unsettling season to focus in on the foundational stories of our faith, that our spirits and consciences may be shaped and formed by the Word of God. When so much all around us is troubled and uncertain, let’s turn our hearts again to the living Word of God, approaching all that is before us now through the lens of faith.

The great Lutheran preacher, Barbara Lundblad, wrote that the biblical text marks our time AND our time marks the text. By this she means that the Holy Book is never finished. And never will be. Each successive generation reads it in new ways and in essence creates a new text. It’s not an ancient book, but a text contemporary to every moment. That’s what makes it alive. That’s what makes it fun and hard—because it’s not simple. It’s written in languages very few of us know, from cultures we may know absolutely nothing about. Addressing problems that may not be the issues we face at all. But yet it is our story. It is our family album. And as we apply our context to it, we find the text opening up ever new meanings and insights. It is God’s living word.

The great stories of our faith give us the big framework for knowing who we are and who God is and who God is for us. As we Methodists maintain, they *contain* the Word of God. They are not, we teach, the literal word of God, but *contain* the Word of God. In our baptismal covenant we are asked: “Do you receive and profess the Christian faith as *contained* in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?” In part what this means is that is our responsibility, our duty as Christians in every age, to study and probe and learn and pray over these old, old stories until the Holy Spirit reveals to us what they are saying to us now. We need to work to “hear what the Spirit is saying to the church” in and through these ancient stories.

Scripture speaks the language of story and poetry and music and history and dreams and letters. It is the expression of poetic intuition and artistic imagination. It is the proclamation of prophetic zeal. It is the recounting of faith as it has been lived out by God’s people. From oral tradition to written word, we believe that it *contains* the living Word of God.

In the beginning, the first chapter of Genesis proclaims: God created...and God saw that it was all very good. God created the world. And in it all kinds of things, everything in the plural. God created waters and seasons. God created one light to rule the day and another kind of light to rule the night. God created fruit trees and trees bearing seed of every kind. God created swarms of living creatures, every kind that lives in the sea and every kind that flies through the sky. And then God created humankind in God’s image. And when it was all done, God blessed the whole creation.

God creates all this wondrous diversity and calls it “Good.” The Creation—in all its abundance and potential. In all its glory and splendor. God blesses it all and calls it “very good.” The diversity of creation is God’s delight.

It is God's joy. It is God's gift. And each and every one of us has a precious and beautiful place in God's magnificent creation.

This is where we begin, where we should always begin. We begin back at the beginning, this generative, loving, expansive beginning that propels us forward to all the new beginnings that become possible each and every day. From the beginning to new beginnings

On this Fourth of July weekend 2020, we would do well to consider new beginnings for our nation. Are we not being called into greater awareness of racial injustice and into new conviction of the absolute necessity of reshaping our common life together? This painful moment carries within it imperatives to do better, to rise up to our highest ideals and the better angels of our nature, as President Abraham Lincoln once appealed. A moment now to strive to live into the ideals of our republic as stated in our creed: "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." This moment is crying out for new beginnings.

For in the beginning, God gave all peoples one common origin and yearns to gather us as one family. In this time of new beginnings, we pray God to fill the hearts of all with the fire of love and the desire to ensure justice for all our sisters and brothers, working together to build a new a human society built on love and peace.

And on this Fourth of July weekend 2020, barbeques and fireworks silenced by the coronavirus, we would also do well to consider new beginnings for safe and healthy life in our neighborhoods and community. Consideration for the other witnessed by our face masks and physical distancing. Doing everything in our power to curtail the spread of the virus, which endangers lives and places nearly unimaginable burdens on all our frontline health care and service workers. A new beginning—valuing one another above our own personal preference or comfort. Uniting in love. One for all and all for one.

On this Fourth of July weekend 2020, we come to the table of life, the table of the Lord where all are welcome, where none is stranger, where the bounteous grace of God in our Lord Jesus Christ offers abundant life and a new beginning each and every time we come. Here, Christ is made new in our minds and hearts, dwelling in us, lifting us up, offering strength for the journey, promising new hope and new dreams. New beginnings this day for our soul and our heart.

Thanks be to God who, from the beginning, has blessed us on our way. Thanks be to God for new beginnings for the living of these days.

Notes:

Bernhard Anderson. *Creation versus Chaos*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1987.

Barbara K. Lundblad. *Marking Time: Preaching Biblical Stories in the Present Tense*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007.