

## Sermon: Creatures of Blessing

Year A, Trinity

[Genesis 1:1-2:4](#); [Psalm 8](#); [2 Corinthians 13:11-13](#); [Matthew 28:16-20](#)

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I lived in Barcelona when I was a junior in high school. The first weekend I was there, my host family had their entire extended tribe over to meet me. Now, you guys know what it's like to meet thirty people who all know each other and you're the new person. You're trying to be charming and you're trying to remember everyone's name. I will say it was more challenging for me than normal since there were all the fancy vocabulary words I had to learn, like "the son of my step-brother's cousin". I could handle one of those things, you could be a son, a brother or a cousin, but you could not be all three. It was clear I was shorting out, and one of the adults send all us kids off to get ice cream. More words I didn't know: "Melocotón", "nata". Then a flavor jumped out at me and I wanted it more than anything, "vanilla". I wanted it because I recognized it.

When we hear the Creation story today, we look at the story and we see all sorts of things we recognize: *cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth*. (Genesis 1:24) We see things we have never seen, like *the great sea monsters*. (Genesis 1:20) We see ourselves, *male and female he created them*. (Genesis 1:27) That's pretty normal. When faced with things we are not familiar with, like a board of ice cream flavors or the creation of the world, we look for and spot what we know. We recognize what we have seen before in what is in front of us.

In this story of Creation, there is only one actor, God. God is the only thing moving, the only thing creating, the only thing speaking. But we are so focused on seeing what we recognize in the story, the humankind, the winged birds of every kind (Genesis 1:21), that we don't recognize that God is woven into the creation that God is calling into being. When I came to this passage, I too was focused on what was familiar to me. So I want to acknowledge how much I gained from Walter Brueggemann's wonderful commentary on Genesis. For specific references, check out the sermon once Candy posts it on-line. It's chock full of footnotes.

The main theme of the Bible appears in this passage: God and God's creation are bound together in a distinctive and delicate way.<sup>1</sup> The binding is inscrutable and irreversible: God speaks new things into being.<sup>2</sup> God's word transforms reality.<sup>3</sup> Whatever God speaks into, whether it is the void of chaos or the place of land and sea and sky that God has already spoken into being, whatever God speaks into becomes new, infused with the mystery of God.<sup>4</sup>

God is there, every day, daily paying attention, daily making something new.<sup>5</sup> Yet that closeness is counterbalanced with distance. What God creates, God creates with the freedom of action.<sup>6</sup> We see that same contrast of closeness and distance in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>7</sup>

God certainly commands things into being, but notice how God does it, "let it be."<sup>8</sup> *Let the waters bring forth* (Genesis 1:20), *Let the earth bring forth* (Genesis 1:24), *Let us make*

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 22.

<sup>2</sup> Brueggemann, 24.

<sup>3</sup> Brueggemann, 26.

<sup>4</sup> Brueggemann, 26.

<sup>5</sup> Brueggemann, 27.

<sup>6</sup> Brueggemann, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Brueggemann, 28.

*humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over creation* (Genesis 1:26). Let it be, let it be, let it be. This isn't an authoritarian command, this is permission, this is invitation. And creation responds, in joy and in an act of glad embrace to connect with this permission.<sup>9</sup> All of creation is made this way: the word spoken, the invitation accepted, the freedom to act pursued.<sup>10</sup> Humankind is part of creation, but not the only part.<sup>11</sup> We are brought into being with the same closeness and distance as the rest of creation.

Whatever else these few sentences tell us about what we recognize, what we are familiar with, what do they tell us about God? That God is bound to God's creation. That words are enough to make those bindings irreversible and everlasting. That whatever God speaks into is infused with the mystery of God. That God's commands are invitations. God is present in daily life and yet expects daily life to involve freedom of action for God's creation.

That is the image we are created in. That is the relationship we are invited into when God offers us dominion over all of creation. The words we speak, like "on average no more than 2°C", like "strengthening worldwide adherence to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species", like "helping those who lose their jobs to environmental regulation". The words we speak transform reality. We are capable of bringing new things into being like "low emission vehicles" or "no kill animal shelters". We are capable of being present in daily life but also allowing all the rest of creation the freedom of action it needs to feed and raise its young, to flourish in the climates for which it is well adapted. Not every creature will survive that freedom, but we need not doom every creature because of our own freedom.

Because we received an extra blessing. In this story of Creation, God is bound to creation through spoken words. God speaks new things into being eight times. But there is only one creature that God speaks to.<sup>12</sup> Humankind. Later, the Bible will speak a great many words about not worshipping idols, since nothing earthly can adequately represent God. But in this first story of Creation, we are made in God's image. God can be seen in the freedom of human persons to be faithful and gracious to the rest of creation.<sup>13</sup> God speaks to us, giving a mandate of power and responsibility for the rest of creation. But it is power exercised as God exercises power.<sup>14</sup>

Humankind is created on the sixth day. And God gave us a special blessing on that day. On the fifth day, the day before, God said *Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.* (Genesis 1:20) *God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind.* (Genesis 1:21). On the fifth day, God blessed them. We sixth day creatures need to remember who received the first blessing that was ever offered in the world. We sixth day creatures, who were blessed in our creation too, need to remember in whose image we were created. We need to be a blessing to the rest of creation. We need to be close enough to care and distant enough to let the rest of Creation get on with the lives that their God-given freedom of action calls them to. We need to be so careful to be creatures of blessing for all the blessed creatures of God.

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<sup>8</sup> Brueggemann, 30.

<sup>9</sup> Brueggemann, 30.

<sup>10</sup> Brueggemann, 30.

<sup>11</sup> Brueggemann, 31.

<sup>12</sup> Brueggemann, 31.

<sup>13</sup> Brueggemann, 32.

<sup>14</sup> Brueggemann, 32.