

"Beginnings: Creation"

Genesis 1

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. So begins the entire Bible. Isn't that crazy. All of the things we believe, all of the stories we know from Scripture start right there with those words: in the beginning. In the beginning, there is no Adam and Eve. There is no Abraham traveling to the Promised Land. There is no Job crying out for God's vindication. There are no Psalms. There is no exile to Babylon because there are no Jews. There is no liberation from Egypt and there is no tabernacle. In the beginning, there is nothing but God. All of life and redemption and faith and sin and anger and joy and sorrow... come later. It's like the moment right before an orchestra plays the first note. The bows are raised, the audience is silent, and all eyes are on the conductor. The baton goes up...in the beginning.

Today we are taking that pause, a moment of anticipation as we wait to see what God is going to do. For the next six weeks, we are going to be going through the book of Genesis, the book of beginnings. Every so often it is good to stop what we are doing. To stop the hubbub of everyday life and to go back and think how did we get here? What were the beginning things that led to us being here in the place? So this is what we're going to do these next six weeks: we're going to go back to those first things, back to the book of Genesis, in order to think about how all of this [gesture] began so that we can understand what we're doing *now*.

So today, we're starting with chapter one, verse one, the beginning of Beginnings, actually quite literally. In Hebrew, the first five books of Scripture—what we call Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy—are each named by the first few words of the book. So since Genesis begins in Hebrew, "Bereshit bara

Elohim," the title of Genesis becomes Bereshit—in the beginning. The book of Genesis is literally the book of beginnings.

As we begin, there are three things I want to talk about today. 1) That God is the *creator*, 2) That God is creator who *creates out of nothing*, and 3) that God is the creator who creates out of nothing and then *calls the creation good*. That God is the creator, who creates out of nothing, and then calls the creation good.

So first, God is the creator. How does the Bible's beginning begin? The beginning begins with God. Bereshit bara *Elohim*. In the beginning, was Elohim, was God. Now as we go through the rest of the Bible, God is going to get more names. God will be called El Shaddai, the God of the Mountain, Adoni, the Lord, El Roi, the God who sees, and the holiest of names, Yahweh, I-am-who-I-am. But here, the word Elohim is just the generic word for God. In the beginning, God simply is just God. We haven't gotten to know this God very much yet. The only word that fits is the rather blank title of God.

But then things start to change. God does something: Elohim *bara!* God creates! Out of the void and darkness, God starts bringing things into being. Let there be...light! Let there be...dry land! Let there be... swarming creatures and great sea monsters!

It's like God is an artist who wakes up in the morning. Now when an artist wakes up does she *have* to begin to sculpt or pick up her oils or put pen to paper? No. No one is forcing her. Maybe she has to pay some bills, but there is nothing requiring her to be creative. She could just as easily do any other job—and probably get paid better for it. That is what we're saying when we

call God our Creator. We are saying that God creates and God doesn't *have* to create. God didn't wake up one morning and was forced to create. God didn't even have bills to pay. God didn't even have to put food on the table. Nobody was putting God's nose to the grindstone. So why did God create?

God created... out of *love*. God created because God is love. Think about this: There is no need for any person to have a child, and yet having children is still the choice of many people. Why is that? Because of love. So it is with God. And much more so. God chooses to create new life out of no necessity. There was no reason God had to create. Humans, on the other hand, get pregnant for all sorts of reasons. They forget their birth control. They feel like having a baby is the next logical step in their lives after buying a house and getting established in their career. Or sometimes, it happens that they didn't actually want to get pregnant at all.

But God, God created new life because God *wanted* to! God loved and in loving created a beloved. How amazing is that. Let me say that again, God loved, God created, and in that act of loving a beloved was created. Us. All of this. We are the beloved. Men and women and children and everything in between are the beloved. The hills around us are the beloved. The springtime ants are the beloved. The rain is the beloved. God, the Creator, is the Lover with a capital L. And as the writer and artist, Henry Miller says, "What sustains the artist is the look of love in the eyes of the beholder." In the beginning God creates because in the beginning God loves and because in the beginning God wants to *be* loved.

So first point, in the beginning God creates, but our second point is that in the beginning God is the creator who *creates out of nothing*. What in the world does that mean? God creates out of nothing. A story might help: This past winter, when the days were so incredibly short I thought I was living in perpetual darkness, I developed a

clementine obsession. You can get a whole bag of them for like five bucks at Trader Joe's. I just loved these clementines. I don't know if I was vitamin-C deficient or what, but they were the most perfect things I'd ever eaten. I would *savor* those clementines. And one day in the middle of it all, I had a realization, this little thing I held it my hand, this is what the grace of creation out of nothingness looks like.

Think about it: scientists can do a lot these days. They can splice trees together and create exotic fruit hybrids like the tangelos and plumcots. They can imitate a clementine's flavor and make citrus-flavored candy. They can do a lot with creation. They can form and re-form it. But there are limits. Imagine scientists in a laboratory trying to replicate the delicate skin that surrounds each slice of a clementine. Imagine them trying to insert that little spray of citrus oil that squirts out when you peel. Impossible! But it *could* possibly be done. But what a scientist can't do—and will never be able to do—is to generate more energy. Science will never be able to create the basics of our world, that is science will never be able to create energy which is the basis of matter. It's would be almost impossible for a scientist to replicate a clementine, but it is and always will be impossible for a scientist to create matter and being out of nothing.

But God creates out of nothing, and that means that God is fundamentally different than we are. We all had a beginning. Everything we see had a beginning, including us. Matter once was not and yet now is. But God does not. God is the only one without beginning. God comes before our beginning because our beginning is from God.

As the Gospel of John says, "In him was life."

The grace of creation out of nothing is the grace that the clementine *exists*. It is saying that for a clementine—in all its pleasure and glory—to exist is a gift. Not even that the delicious taste and the lovely smell can compare with the mere

fact that it exists. That we exist. That we have matter. God creating out of nothing means that all things have our existence due to God. All of Creation is a gift—including our very lives.

So point number two: God creates out of nothing and we have our being from him.

Now, here's the final point: God is the creator who creates out of nothing and then calls the creation good. Six times the Bible says that God looks at what has just been created and calls it good, and then, God creates humankind, sees all that he has made, and the Bible says, "Behold, it was *very good*." Behold, not just good—*very good*.

Now I want to pause here for a moment. Does the Bible say that only the higher, more spiritual beings are good? No. Does the Bible say that it is only our souls that are good? No. Does the Bible say that only what transcends this flesh of ours is good? No. What does the Bible say that God says is good? *Every thing* that he had made.

Our souls are good, yes, but our *bodies* are good too. Our fingers and bellies and thighs, and toenails all of those are good. We are created, and so we are good. Goodness is the first fact of our lives. Our goodness comes before our fall. The serpent and the bite of fruit comes after we are declared good.

If you had a chance to glance at the April Bell, I wrote an article about how our bodies are temples. We have to love our bodies because God loves our bodies. We have to treat our bodies gently because we weren't the ones who created our bodies. God did. We have to receive all of the goodness of our bodies, even when our bodies do silly things or give out on us or don't do what we want them to do. Our bodies exist and so they are good.

In the beginning, God created and everything we see around us began. Because God is love, we

live and we move and we have our being. God loved us and so we exist. Not out of any necessity but because God is

God is the creator, who creates out of nothing, and then calls the creation good. Amen.