

WESTWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH/MAY 16, 2010
IT WAS GOOD/GENESIS 1:26-2:3

I. PRAYER: God be in our minds and in our hearts, in our being and in our doing. By your Spirit, speak to us of eternal things, weighty things that we might be strengthened for our living and for our loving. Amen.

II. GENESIS

In the beginning... The opening pages of our sacred text are among the best known... and perhaps the most often misunderstood of all of our sacred texts. They have been the source of battles over high school textbooks and a litmus test of true belief. But, it was never intended to be a science textbook, Genesis. Another dubious gift of the Enlightenment – reducing sacred texts to timelines and loveless mechanics – forcing them into scientific frameworks – asking questions of them they were never intended to answer. Ancient Israel had no interest in what we today would call “scientific issues.”

Nor are the first eleven chapters of Genesis history texts – we don’t read them as we would read, for example, *The Civil War: A History*, by Harry Hansen. These sacred texts are pre-history – their concern is not a detailed, ordered timeline of exactly how things happened one week way back when. Thus, all scientific theories about the origin of the world are left on the table.

Well then, if it is neither science nor history, what is it? The early Genesis account is first and foremost a theological text. It focuses on far more significant matters than “how long it took” or in “what order it happened.” The focus of these sacred texts is far grander – we would be wise to seek a different genre of information from their pages. The beginning Genesis chapters are intended instead to stir the soul and

connect us with the transcendent – they deal with large matters, deep matters. When we read them below their surface we find a wealth of truth that helps us understand the very nature of our existence... questions hardwired into the human soul.

Why is there something rather than nothing?

Why am I here? What does it all mean?

What is the relationship between creator and creature?

And, what is the nature of the relationship between the creature and the creation?

It is this last question that our children and youth explore with us this morning on our intergalactic journey – what is our relationship with creation? We learn from the first chapter of Genesis that God created a fantastic world. The author records that God finished the project, looked over the divine handiwork and on that final day the superlative comes out... “God saw that it was **very** good.” God was delighted! John Calvin wrote, “The creation is quite like a spacious and splendid house, provided and filled with the most exquisite and at the same time the most abundant furnishings. Everything in it tells us of God.” Step into chapter two and read that God placed us in the spacious and splendid house, the exquisite garden with work to be done – ours was to “to till it and keep it.”ⁱ Ours was to tend the creation with care – to enhance it, to respect it, to work for its wellness. Walter Brueggeman asserts, “From the beginning of human destiny, God is prepared to entrust the garden to the human creature. From the beginning, the human creature is called, given a vocation and expected to share in God’s work.”ⁱⁱ

But somewhere along the way we lost sight of this God-given vocation – a vision our children re-capture for us this morning. We’ve watched, stunned, these past three weeks as oil gushes from the Gulf floor – we’re angered at British Petroleum for their catastrophic failure to tend the human garden well – indeed it is a tragic, epic environmental disaster. But, it is so much easier to point the finger at one colossal failure than it is to notice the dozens of little daily personal failures to live gently on the earth.

We’ll let our children take it from here – they are good little theologians, who have a great deal at stake in whether or not we will re-engage with our call to tend the earth well. I close with the words of Fyodor Dostoyevski, “Love all of God’s creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light! Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will soon perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.”

PRAYER: Creating, sustaining, Lord of heaven and earth – put it within our hearts to love all the things you love – to cherish the well-made planet you placed under our care – to walk gently on an earth that you yourself declared to be very good. We pray in the name of the risen Christ. **AMEN AND AMEN.**

ⁱ Genesis 2:15

ⁱⁱ Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation: Genesis*, p. 46.