

“On the Third Day”

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Gaylord, Michigan

Sunday, September 24, 2023

Texts: Genesis 1: 9-13 and Genesis 2b-9

This morning, I would like to try something a little different. I'd like to share the scripture with you, both visually and verbally one more time and ask you to take a few minutes to ponder what this scripture might mean to you.

What sticks out for you? What questions arise? We've all heard the Genesis 1 story of creation many times, and yet, do we stop and ponder what is happening here? Here's Genesis 1: 9-13 again (you can pull out your phone and Google Genesis, Chapter 1 Contemporary English Bible, if you want more context):

⁹ God said, "Let the waters under the sky come together into one place so that the dry land can appear." And that's what happened. ¹⁰ God named the dry land Earth, and he named the gathered waters Seas. God saw how good it was. ¹¹ God said, "Let the earth grow plant life: plants yielding seeds and fruit trees bearing fruit with seeds inside it, each according to its kind throughout the earth." And that's what happened. ¹² The earth produced plant life: plants yielding seeds, each according to its kind, and trees bearing fruit with seeds inside it, each according to its kind. God saw how good it was.

¹³ There was evening and there was morning: the third day.

(Allow 30-60 seconds for reflection)

“And there was evening and there was morning: the third day.” Did any of you find it interesting what happens on the third day? “The third day is unique in at least a couple of ways. On most other days God steps back at the end of the day and pronounces creation “good”. Here God pronounces creation “good” twice. The third day is the only day to receive this double blessing. There is power, the writers of scripture seem to be suggesting, in the number three (Cooperrider, p100).” Before I tell you some of those meanings, a short quiz. Can you think of any other important “threes” in the Bible (responses)? This isn’t really a test; I believe that it is important to see themes in our Bible and begin to wrestle with what the authors are trying to convey. I believe patterns talk more about the message of the Bible than just quoting a scripture or two.

With thanks to Daniel Cooperrider, here is more about numbers in our Bible, especially the number three. “In Jewish numerology, one symbolizes unity, agreement, simplicity. On the first day of creation, according to Genesis, life as such hadn’t been created yet. There was only God. Day one, in a sense, was a day of one, of unity, of completion.”

The number two symbolizes separation, dichotomy, and tension. On the second day, God separates the waters above (heaven) from below (earth), creating

a basic duality. The second day, interestingly, is the only day not pronounced “good”.

The number three is the number of harmony that includes bringing together two opposites. On the third day, God set the opposites working together in order to create life – plants and trees. The third day doesn’t undo or fix the separation of the second day, but it brings the opposites together to be part of a greater whole. And it’s this third day, the day when the duality is transcended and made generative, that is pronounced doubly good. This power of “the third day” is a recurring motif in scripture.” Jonah spends three days in the belly of the great fish. Jesus spends three days in the tomb. And one I didn’t realize, “Jesus’s first miracle—turning water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana – was said to have occurred on “the third day” (John 2:1). This is why some traditional Jewish families continue to hold weddings on the third day, on Tuesday, the day of tress, the day of double blessing (Cooperrider, p101).”

Several authors talk about the blessing of the third way, where we overcome the dualities among us. Things that seem opposite and opposed to one another can indeed both maintain their integrity, while finding a space, or third way to reach a positive outcome. In the words of Father Richard Rohr, “The contemplative stance is the Third Way. We stand in the middle, neither taking the world on from another

power position nor denying it for fear of the pain it will bring. We hold the hardness of reality and the suffering of the world *until it transforms us*, knowing that we are both complicit in evil and can participate in wholeness and holiness. Once we can stand in that third spacious way, neither directly fighting nor fleeing, we are in the place of grace out of which genuine newness can come. *This is where creativity and new forms of life and healing emerge (Daily Meditations, Center for Action and Contemplation, June 4, 2018).*”

Maybe, with a few minutes here, you can think of a place where you are stuck. It’s easy to pick politics as it would be hard to imagine anything more dualistic these days, but I’d rather invite you to think of a place in your own life where you and others are caught in separation from each other. You’re stuck in the “second day” -- so to speak. In the quiet of the room, please take a few moments to consider if there might be a third way. The way to approach this is not to ask, “what’s the third way?”, but just to be still for a moment and see if anything comes forward. This may be a first time for you, so don’t fret if you struggle. I’m going to lead you in a brief meditation. Most often people close their eyes and adopt some kind of open presence to the Spirit. Once you’re relaxed, allow your heart and mind to be open to what may occur in you.

Be still and know that I am God;

Be still and know that I AM;

Be still and know;

Be still.

Be.

(give a few minutes for meditation)

I know this sermon is very different from what you are used to. Maybe it was even uncomfortable. We're so used to using words about everything, thinking that if we talk enough a solution will unfold. Sometimes it does. Often, however, we need silence, we need presence, we need to stop long enough to consider what might be available to us when we stop long enough to listen.

A little bit more about the third day and how it unfolds in the Bible. Maybe these ideas from Daniel Cooperrider will give you other ideas to solve the problems in your own life. Consider: Another unique aspect to the third day in Genesis is that God makes a subtle change to God's method of creating. On the first two days of creation, God directly calls the thing in question into being – let there be light...let there be a dome... It's a decidedly top-down way of creating. On the third day though, God doesn't actually create plants and trees directly, top-down, but calls on the earth itself to bring forth plants and trees...In a sense God is inviting the

earth to be a co-creator, to be a partner in the process of creation, and from this point on, creation and creativity won't only be a top-down affair, but something that can rise up from below.

Interestingly, Genesis 1 says much the same thing when it comes to the creation of humanity on day six. Biblical scholars have pointed out a symmetry built into the first six days of creation. Day three parallels day six...And although God doesn't exactly pronounce a double blessing on the sixth day, God does magnify the common blessing refrain. God looks over everything and declares it not just good, but "very good".

It's with this parallel structure connecting days three and six, the first creation account in Genesis suggests a deep kinship between trees and humans, a foundation for the major presence of trees throughout the Bible. Trees, in some sense, are the models, the prototypes of living beings working with God, as partners in creation. It's the same task God honors us with (Cooperrider, p103).

Tasked to be co-creators. Called to find the third way. Claimed to be God's partners. God looked at the earth and pronounced it good twice on day three.

And on day six, God looked at humanity and said, "it is very good". The pattern of three.

The Third Way leads to life and life abundant. *This is where creativity and new forms of life and healing emerge.*

In the many blessed names of God. Amen.