In the Beginning. . .. God!

Genesis 1: 1-8; Psalm 8

It’s a good thing I was not in charge of creation. I don’t begin to have the imagination necessary to create a rock, much less a universe. The writer Annie Dillard said, “If creation had been left up to me, I’m sure I wouldn’t have had the imagination or courage to do more than shape a single, reasonably sized atom, smooth as a snowball, and let it go at that.”

The writer of Genesis did not have the imagination to create a world, any more than Annie Dillard did, but he had the intelligence to recognize the Creator of all that is and write an amazing faith account that placed creation in a context we can understand. He chose to explain it by the measure of time. He used a common metaphor of days in a week to spin out his amazing faith story. He wasn’t trying to make a scientific description, he was expressing his faith and the faith of his people. He knew no human being could have created all that is, but he also knew the Creator was a living, loving, intelligent spirit being who had created human beings out of the ‘stuff’ of the earth. He also knew that language is what we use to express ideas and connect with other people, so he put the Creator’s actions into words, only the words the Creator spoke had the power make things happen.

He called the Creator God. He said that in the beginning God’s creation was a chaotic mix of wind, water, and firmament which existed in a void of darkness. He said, “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.” That had to be more fearsome than any tornado, typhoon, or hurricane we know. Yet God was in the midst of the chaos and spoke words that brought order out of it.

The way God began to bring order was the creation of light. God used the light to push back the darkness and separate the realms of night and day. God saw that the light was good and called it ‘day.’ The darkness he called ‘night,’ for it was also good. “And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.”

When I was a dean at Pilgrim Lodge I recognized the way God had ordered the nights and days, placing the night before the day. So I had all my days at camp begin in the evening. Each evening we had a countdown ceremony to begin a new day. After a new day was declared, I told everyone it was now time to rest to prepare for the coming new day. I felt it not a gimmick, but a way to make our time at Pilgrim Lodge special.
When I try to wrap my little mind around Creation, I find myself being boggled by the enormity of it all. The Genesis writer would have been astounded by the revelations of the Hubble telescope but they probably would not have changed his account of Creation. He portrayed the heavens as a dome with the sun, moon, and stars all fixed in it. That made perfect sense in his limited vision of the universe. Today, he would use more expansive language, but still express the wonder of it all.

Those times when I have been out under the expansive night sky, away from the artificial lights, which rob us of a true experience of the wonders of the night, I am overwhelmed by the magnificence of it all. Wendell Berry says the Bible is really an outdoor book, which ought to be read outdoors. Berry says, "I don't think it is enough appreciated how much an outdoor book the Bible is. It is a 'hypaethral book,' such as [Henry] Thoreau talked about--a book open to the sky. It is best read and understood outdoors, and the farther outdoors the better. Or that has been my experience of it. Passages that within walls seem improbable or incredible, outdoors seem merely natural. This is because outdoors we are confronted everywhere with wonders; we see that the miraculous is not extraordinary but the common mode of existence. It is our daily bread."

As the Psalmist in Psalm eight exclaimed, “O LORD, our Sovereign, how magnificent is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. . . . When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” Mindful of us indeed – we are like specks of dust on the face of the Earth; like the dust of the Earth from which we are created. Yet our wonderful, loving Creator is mindful of us. The Psalmist says, “Yet you have made them little lower than God, and have crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands, you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the sea.”

We have been given dominion over the earth, but it is not ours to do with whatever we wish. We are not to despoil it as so many have and continue to do. It is ours as a sacred trust to live in and pass on to future generations.

When God created the universe it was so marvelous that no one person could comprehend it all. It isn’t necessary to completely comprehend it to appreciate it. If we only see a tiny portion of Creation it is enough. No human being was present at the dawn of Creation, yet it has fascinated for all eternity, from the writer of Genesis, to the Psalmist, to us.

Take a walk out under the sky on a dark night, away from the lights of civilization, and look up at the moon and the stars. Try to comprehend that
the light from the stars has been coming here over eons of time, perhaps millions of light years, not just hours and days. Then think about the Creator of all that is. God knew that we would someday see this Creation. God wants us to be overwhelmed by it. From the very beginning God was present and speaking words that became the stuff of the universe.

Can you believe it? Think about it. Before you were even formed in your mother’s womb God knew you and made you little less than God. That is something for which we should be eternally grateful. Thanks be to God, our Creator. AMEN