

“How did God create the world?”
“What was it like when He first created the earth?”
January 9, 2011
Grove Presbyterian Church

Recently someone’s faith was puzzled, maybe even rattled, by how we can challenge certain depictions about the birth of Jesus, rejecting the idea of stables and homelessness, and see instead how Jesus was born in the springtime in the family kitchen surrounded by a loving family and friends.

It led to a rash statement that the Bible then must be a lie. Nuances can be uncomfortable.

The Bible isn’t the lie. What is false is what our culture assumes about the Bible. How our culture uses the Bible to support views we want to push. We use it rather than really listen.

What distorts our understanding of the Bible are our lazy assumptions. We make a lot of assumptions.

Take for instance our maps of the earth. You look at map-maker Mercator’s flat version and it appears as if Greenland is the size of South America, when in reality the land mass of Greenland is a quarter the size of Brazil.

Mercator, to his credit, didn’t suggest it was a factual representation of the earth --- his map was a mathematical depiction for the sake of navigation.

Lazy assumption: Jesus was born in a stable and homeless

Lazy assumption: Slavery wasn’t the primary cause of the Civil War

Lazy assumption: The worst and most decisive battle in World War II was D-Day

Lazy assumption: The Sun revolves around the earth

Lazy assumption: Ours is the only galaxy

Lazy assumption: President Obama wasn’t born in the United States

Lazy assumption: Jesus was white and blonde

We distort the reality.

As we often do with how creation occurs.

The curious twist is that the Psalm we heard -- Psalm 33 -- predates Genesis probably by about 200 hundred years. It is why I chose it from among the many other creation stories in the Bible. We tend to limit ourselves by thinking there are only the two Genesis accounts. If Psalm 33 predates Genesis, perhaps it was the writers of Genesis who used the themes of this Psalm as their source.

John did when he began his Gospel with his song.

Listen: John 1: 1-5

**In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.
What has come into being in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.
The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.**

So what's today's question from our Confirmation Class?

**“How did God create the world?”
“What was it like when He first created the earth?”**

We can be grateful you Confirmands avoided asking, “When did God create the world?” because then we'd have to get into all that distraction about creationism and evolution and make me pull out my six year old timelines.

Oh, look -- I already did. Well, since the signs already are strung, we'll take a detour before we really chew on your question.

Just so long as we all understand there are two basic ways to interpret the Bible – and both are fine and dandy. Both are valid. I've never agreed that you must choose between creationism or evolution. Why debate trivialities? Since when is life so black or white? Actually, the real debate isn't between the Bible and Science, it is between the different ways we read the Bible.

The first way is depicted by these timeline signs posted from the organ here behind me to the back right window. 1,000 years equals 10 feet. This way is called the historical narrative reading of the Bible, where everything written is not just truth but actual fact. We thank Bishop Ussher from the 17th century for calculating how the earth is very young, created in 4004 BC. I believe he figured out it was Sunday, October 23. And yes, old Triceratops and Tyrannosaurus Rex co-existed peaceably with little Adam and Eve. Peaceable because -- according to the Bible -- everyone, until after the flood, even Raptors, were all vegetarians. I'm guessing all those pointy, nasty teeth were useful in opening up coconuts. I suppose the new Creation Theme Park in Kentucky has better answers.

So then we follow the string, every 10 feet a 1,000 years and we come to the Great Flood (2348 BC), then Abraham (1900), Moses (1250), with the Iron Age right after (1200), then the Hebrews in Babylonian Captivity (586), until we come to the Christ and the beginning of the new age (6 B).

Or...

Or. We follow the alternative timeline of science and appreciate the Bible metaphorically, as a theological document concerned with speaking spiritual truth rather than scientific fact. This is my path.

So, we get a different timeline, still with 10 feet for each 1,000 years. In this case we see the earliest versions of ourselves (homo sapiens sapiens, as opposed to the other forms of human that became extinct) evolving around 500,000 years ago. That would put our origins, using this same time scale, down around the Middle School. Lucy, an early hominid, a pre-human, walked around what we call Ethiopia 3.5 millions years ago – near the Sunbury Christian Academy.

T-Rex hunted as early as the late Cretaceous period, 85 million years ago (around Grove City College). With a roar and snarl.

Pangaea (when we were all one continent) existed 225 million years ago – around Toledo Ohio.

Multi-cellular organism emerged 1,500 million years ago (California).

And old mother earth congealed into solid form over 4,600 million years ago (that'll take us to China).

~~~

Fortunately, we can get beyond all this and get down to the real question: not when, but how was the world created? This moves us from fussing about whose facts are correct to being moved by matters of faith.

Far more interesting.

Far more interesting and frankly far more helpful.

We seek a faith that helps us live in this creation as creatures. Day by day. Give me a reason to wake up. Give us a purpose for making coffee, making love, making a living...

~~~

John 1, Psalm 33 – these aren't Scientific explanations, these are faith affirmations! Despite a broken creation, still a reason to trust. A reason to hope. A reason to be glad.

These are faith statements born from human experience. Who needs to nit-pick over the blueprints when you're already living in the house? Who needs to open the box and pull out and examine the instructions when the toy already is made and ready and given for you to play with it? We let daddies and mommies worry about Barbie Pink Three-story Dream Townhouse, worrying about Tab A going into Slot B.

What's in the Box?

House pieces, stickers, and over 55 pieces and accessories. (Batteries not included.)

As a side note: While assembling the townhouse, be sure to follow the directions for the elevator carefully, since the parts look similar and could be confusing.

Who cares? Child just wants to play.

It is. Already is. Who cares when? Who needs details?

How creation? By mom. By dad. Santa too.

It just is. And thank you. Creation too.

Other mythologies of creation? They describe to a fault creation as combat, gods as rivals, the mighty battle, with creation as chaos.

Not here.

How? By the Word.

***By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,
and all their host by the breath of his mouth.***

For what is Word but sound organized into consonants to give meaning, with vowels the sound to get us from one consonant to the next. And what is sound but breath, the spirit, organized?

What was it like before creation? A mess. A roiling mess. Bits and pieces of plastic pieces strewn out upon the floor. Chaos. Purposelessness with potential. Just like me.

Until the breath of an idea of what the mess can become is voiced and heard. Word bringing form to the idea. The idea crafted into a reality shared.

All this, the Psalm affirms. All people too. Tribes and nations part of the creation.

And more than creation. Redemption. The chance for something better: "Evil is the intrusion." Only a few Psalms highlight and extol God as creator. Most are far more

concerned with praising the saving acts of God, God bringing hope and meaning, sense and courage into our days.

The Word guiding our chaos into something meaningful. The Word fashioning our hearts too.

What brings life? Breath. Baby's first gulp. What brings vitality? Take a deep breath. Long and cleansing breath.

Creation is ongoing. For God is as good as God's Word.

So long as there still is breath, God still is creating....