

First Presbyterian Church of Santa Fe

Adult Education Class on July 18, 2021

Presenter: Allen Gullledge

So this morning, we are looking at Adam and Eve and the beginning of things. This is many times called “Origins” for most of us; it is the first few Chapters of Genesis, the first book of our Bible.

Let me start off with a quote from Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) “Sacred writings are bound in two volumes—that of creation and that of Holy Scripture.”

The apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20, “Ever since God created the world, His everlasting power and deity, however invisible, have been there for the mind to see in the things God has made.”

God can be found in nature, maybe first in nature, because for 1500 years, very few Christians ever got a chance to read the Bible.

In Genesis 1:31, the writer says, “God looked at everything God had made, and found it very good.”

We have decided our God and what he wants to say to us is found in a book, while God is saying, “Look around, I am everywhere.”

Father Richard Rohr, in Albuquerque—who has been such a teacher and inspiration to me through his writings—says that, for some reason, we got rid of the God of Genesis 1 who made us in His image, “to be like us”: the ultimate compliment to our species. Now, we could spend hours on why the writer quotes God as using plural language, “let us make man in our image.” But let’s move on. Back to Rohr’s thought, we don’t remember the God of Genesis 1 but only the God of Genesis 3 who throws Adam and Eve out of Eden for disobedience; and you and I are cursed by that first man and woman and have to spend the rest of our lives trying to make God love us so as not to spend eternity in Hell. We touched last week on Jonathan Edwards’ famous sermon called “Sinners in the hands of an Angry God.” It was written and delivered in 1741. Edwards was a Puritan Minister.

Are we in the hands of an angry God? Born behind the eight-ball, cursed, guilty until proven innocent, well not “innocent,” rather “redeemed.”

So, which is it? Does God love us or does He want to send us to Hell? And I know it is a great temptation to say that God has elements of both in his personality and then we move quickly to Jesus who was sent by the Father to die for our sins so that God didn’t have to punish us for eternity but welcome us home to his Kingdom. And this is the basis for much of our Christian Conservative Theology, the basics. And we read in the New Testament that the Holy Spirit is busy interceding for us with God as

is Jesus. And doesn't this sound like God really doesn't like us very much and has to be constantly prodded not to turn against us. This is where I'm moving us toward, this almost post-Reformation where we start trusting the Holy Spirit, the part of the Trinity that we are specifically given access to but which has seemed to be pushed to the edges during the Reformation of education; "education," it's all in the book or books.

Wrestle with that while I go off on another tangent, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate* by John H. Walton.

When we read Genesis, we are reading an ancient document and should begin by using only the assumptions that would be appropriate for the ancient world. We must understand how the ancients thought and what ideas underlay their communication.

We are obliged to respect the text by recognizing the sort of text that it is and the nature of the message that it offers. In that regard, we have long recognized that the Bible is not a scientific textbook. That is, God's intention is not to teach science or to reveal science. He does reveal his work in the world, but he doesn't reveal how the world works.

The text talks about thinking with our hearts or intestines, it is not proposing scientific ideas that we must confirm if we wish to take Biblical authority seriously. (The people God used to write His scriptures knew nothing of anything we would consider knowledge, book reading.)

So, when the text talks about the water below the vault and the water above the vault (Gen. 1:6), we do not have to construct a cosmic system that has waters above and waters below. Everyone in the ancient world believed there were waters above because when it rained, water came down.

Therefore, when the Biblical text talks about "water above" (Gen. 1:7), it is not offering authoritative revelation of scientific facts. If we conclude that there are not, strictly speaking, waters above, we have not thereby identified an error in Scripture. Rather, we have recognized that God vests the authority of the text elsewhere.

We, therefore, recognize that although the Bible is written for us (indeed, for everyone), it is not written to us.

This is especially true when we interpret the text as if it is making reference to modern science, of which the author and audience had no knowledge. The text cannot mean what it never meant.

We must be cautious about reflexively imposing our cultural assumptions on the text.

All translation is interpretation, and we have no inspired translations.

If the translation “create” takes us in the right direction (and I believe that it does), we start with the idea that we are dealing with a verb that expresses the transition between non-existence and existence.

We find in Genesis 2 a different way of telling the same story. In the light of the Reformation which we are still operating under as Protestants—though I offered the thought that maybe it’s running out of gas—but if we follow the battle cry of the Reformation, “Sola Scriptura” (“Only Scripture”), then we have to deal with Genesis 2 in some form or fashion. As it appears to be a sequel to part of the creation story in Genesis 1, let’s jump to Genesis 3.

John Walton tells us, “Adam and Eve would not have called each other these names, because whatever they spoke, it was not Hebrew.”

The names are Hebrew, and there is no Hebrew at the point in time when Adam and Eve lived.

These characters, by virtue of their assigned names, are larger than the historical characters to whom they refer. They represent something beyond themselves. Consequently, we can see from the start that interpretation may not be straightforward. More is going on than giving some biographical information about two people in history.

Jump back to Genesis 2, which is where we learn that God says to Adam and not Eve (the prototype man; because in Genesis 2, Eve hasn’t been created yet from Adam’s rib) that he “may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the Garden, except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die” (first mention of death). After God creates Eve from Adam’s rib, the chapter ends with Adam and Eve being completely naked and feeling no self-consciousness.

We know what happens next.

The Old Testament as a whole does not give retrospective information about what we call “the fall.” Once the events are reported in Genesis 3, no further reference is made to those events or to their ramifications.

(REMEMBER THE BIBLE WITH AND WITHOUT JESUS.)

We read these origin stories with prejudice—with an interpretation already given to us—so we, as readers, just as the Hebrew writers, come to any scripture with cultural consciousness and, therefore, cultural **biases**. It is important to note that for the effect of moving the narrative along, Adam and Eve pretty much disappear early in Chapter 4 after bringing into the world two sons, Cain and Abel. Adam gets mentioned in Chapter 5 as having lived 930 years. Then we move on to Noah, God floods the world, the Hebrew nation rises out of the aftermath. All this told to us by Hebrew authors.

Now, without our cultural bias of knowing that Jesus is coming, we read the rest of the Old Testament, and we see that no matter what happens, God is involved, He is present, and He keeps coming back and desires relationship with people. Not to punish, but to share His wisdom and to go forth with them.

People in our society have heard from both the secular world and the Christian world that to accept Christ means to reject certain scientific conclusions... a step many cannot take. They have been told that to become a Christian means to believe the Bible; to believe the Bible means to jettison science that they find convincing. So, they remain outside looking in.

People inside the church have heard their revered pastors tell them that people who believe in evolution cannot be Christians. In repeated surveys of those who have become disillusioned with the church, this is listed as one of the primary reasons.

What if we could tell them that their scientific conclusions did not make a difference and that they could still believe in the Bible, could still be in relationship with Christ, could still be members in good standing in the church? Wouldn't that make a difference? There is no need to lose our young people to this debate.

John Walton says: We have tried to demonstrate that Genesis 1 is concerned with God's ordering of sacred space with the goal of being in relationship with us. We have tried to demonstrate further that the Adam account is more concerned with the entry of disorder into the world than with giving an account of human origins. These are conclusions that derive from a faithful reading of Scripture and offer legitimate alternatives even if they do not convince all readers.

I want to quote a Franciscan sister Ilia Delio who writes: "The world is created as a means of God's self-revelation so that like a mirror or footprint, it might lead us to love and praise the creator. We are created to read the book of creation so that we may know the Author of Life. This book (creation) is an expression of who God is and is meant to lead humans to what it signifies, namely the Eternal Trinity of dynamic, self-diffusive love."