

## “Creation: The Original Good News”

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The Second Sunday in the Season of Creation

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Genesis 1:1-13, 24-31a; Matthew 6:26-33

A teacher once told us, “Never overlook the obvious.” Yet nothing is more obvious—or more often overlooked—than creation, especially in our mechanized, industrialized, computerized, human-made environment.

I’m not talking about “stuff” when I speak of creation. Stuff is stuff. Stuff is overflowing from our attics and basements and garages and spare rooms. And now it’s threatening to smother us in the form of trash. As the pain medication commercial puts it, “So much stuff!”

Creation is where stuff comes from. God makes creation. We make stuff.

Creation isn’t ours to make because creation belongs to God. And in our consumption-driven global economy, we are consuming God’s creation to make our stuff. And we’re overdoing it. Badly. That’s the bad news.

But this morning isn’t devoted to the bad news. It’s devoted to the good news, also known as the gospel. And although most of us think of the good news as starting with Jesus, the writers of the New Testament remind us that understanding Jesus means that you have to understand the Word of God, which was in the beginning with God and was, in fact, God.

To understand what Christians mean when we speak of the good news of Jesus, we have to go all the way back to Genesis, because **the story of creation is where the good news begins.**

One of the relatively few things that we Christians do tend to agree on is that the story of Jesus is the story of God’s love for the world. John 3:16, perhaps the best known verse in the Bible, in the King James Version, says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son. . . .”

That true statement does not say that God started loving the world when God gave it a divine Son. God’s love doesn’t begin with incarnation. **Incarnation reveals the love that has always been God’s character.**

God's love for the world began when the world began: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

That's not a value-neutral statement of history or astronomy or geology. It's not a scientific statement.

It's a theological statement.

It's the primordial expression of divine love.

Why? Because we believe that creation is good and because we believe that creation is not necessary. Existence is gratuitous – it is an expression of God's love, just like Jesus.

**Creation did not have to happen.**

**God did not need a universe.**

**Creation is a gift freely given—and that is why existence itself is good news.**

The story of the gospel started long before Jesus. And it's still being told.

So in this Season of Creation, we're not going to look just at caring for creation, important though that is. We're also going to look at incarnation and redemption, because that's where so much Christian attention has been focused across the centuries, and those doctrines can only be rightly understood in the context of creation.

Those foundational Christian teachings belong together because, taken together, **creation, incarnation, and redemption tell one coherent Christian story about God and God's interactions with God's world.**

And during the Season of Creation, that coherence becomes especially important: creation is not merely the setting in which salvation happens; it is part of what God loves, enters, and intends to renew.

And that **divine activity and intention** are the twin sources of true Christian hope and true Christian joy.

And joy, as one of you pointed out to me this past week, is the most effective antidote to the anxiety and distemper of our age or, I would argue, any age.

Here we are on this side of Labor Day. Summer is officially over.

Do you remember what it was like to be a child who hoped and wished that summer would never end? Do you remember how much you loved the freedom of long sunny days,

the exuberance of playing with friends, the excitement of outings and reunions, the anticipation of visits to relatives, and the adventures of camping trips and picnics?

None of those happy memories could have happened apart from creation. Creation isn't an abstraction. Creation is the world in which joy is possible.

Creation isn't simply around us; creation **is** us. And we are creation. Not all of it, of course, but part of it. We are a part – two words, a part – of creation. We are not apart – one word – from it.

We have spent centuries imagining a great divide between human beings and the rest of creation. But the more we learn about the natural world, the harder that absolute separation becomes to maintain. We are not outside creation looking in. We are God's beloved creatures among God's other beloved creatures.

In the first chapter of our story, God repeatedly looks upon what has been made and calls it good. Psalm 24 goes even further: *"The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it."*

That has important theological consequences and raises the basic theological question: **What is our relationship meant to be with the world God has made?**

Or, to put it more simply, **How, then, are we to live?**

The Christian gospel has always claimed to have an answer to that question – **the** answer, according to some Christians – and that answer has always been some version of following Jesus.

But following Jesus does not mean ignoring God's creation. Following Jesus means learning how to live as creatures within God's creation.

"When I was hungry, you gave me food. When I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink."

Those words from Matthew 25, about how we are to care for the vulnerable, depend entirely on how we interact with God's creation no less than how we interact with each other. There is no way to love our neighbor without encountering creation, because everything we give one another comes through the created world.

Following Jesus begins with how we encounter God's creation—and all its inhabitants—with wonder, gratitude, humility, respect, and care—because **creation is already woven into every act of discipleship.**

**Before there was sin, there was goodness.**

**Before there was redemption, there was creation.**

**Before there was a cross, there was a garden.**

The gospel doesn't begin with what's wrong with the world.

**It begins with what's right with the world.**

Perhaps, then, one of the things it means to follow Jesus is to learn, once again, how to receive that original good news: to recognize ourselves as creatures among creatures, to love the world God has made, and to care for it as something that belongs not to us, but to God.

- **Creation tells us where we belong.**
- **Incarnation tells us how profoundly God identifies with where we belong.**
- **Redemption tells us where God intends that belonging to lead.**

So our discipleship begins not by standing outside creation and deciding what to do with it, but by recognizing that we are already part of it—creatures among creatures, loved by the God who made us, entered our world, and promises to renew it.

Friends, creation is not merely where our story began.

It is where our discipleship begins.