

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
The Genesis of Our Faith: Creation
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Genesis 1:1-5; Revelation 21:1-5a

Some people believe that it began in 1859. Others say it began in the early 1920s. Regardless of when it began, the debate between evolution and creationism has consumed churches, school boards and state legislatures for the last 100 years. This debate could have begun in 1859 with the publication of The Origin of the Species, by Charles Darwin because the book introduced the concept that species evolve over time through a process of natural selection. Yet, initially, many Christians saw God's hand in the process of natural selection and accepted that God could use evolution as a means of continuing creation. However by the 1920's more conservative Christian churches rejected Darwin's work. These churches insisted on a literal reading of the creation narrative, meaning that God created everything as it now exists in six, 24-hour days. This is what is called "Young Earth Creationism." I mention this debate not because we will engage in it, but because I believe the entire debate between creationism and evolution misses the purpose of this opening chapter of Genesis. It misses the chapter's purpose because this is a religious and not scientific text...meaning the chapter is intended to tell us some things about God and some things about us. It is not intended to tell us something about the physics of creation. And not only that, what we learn about God and ourselves from this chapter is essential to our understanding and living our faith. So, over the next few minutes we will look at four discoveries that this chapter contains that will assist us in our faith journey.

Discovery one is that life matters to God. Note I did not say that God is about creation. I said that life matters to God, which is what the first chapter of Genesis is about. It is about God bringing life into existence. If we were to have read the entire first chapter, this would have become clearer. Chapter One about the creation of plants of multiple kinds, of a wide variety of fish in the sea and birds of the air, of plants yielding seed so they can reproduce, of fruit trees of every kind, of swarms of living creatures in the sea and on the land, of birds, cattle, creeping things, and wild animals. And all of these are to multiply and cover the earth. And let's be clear, God was not forced to create all of this. God was not under contract to create. God created life because life matters to God. This is why Jesus can later say that he came to bring life and life abundant. This is why Jesus can say that God is the God of the living and not the dead. This discovery is critical to our faith because it reminds us that all life, and not simply human life, matters to God.

Discovery two is that God is a risk taker. I realize that you might not have ever heard someone say that before. But if we take seriously that God creates life, then God is taking a risk in that act of creation. Let me explain. I have taken this poll before, but we will do so again, how many of you were children once? Ok, so most of you. When your parents gave you birth, or fostered you, or adopted you, they were taking a risk because sooner or later, you would learn the most powerful two-letter word in the English language, "no." And as soon as a child learns that word and uses it, the child becomes a separate person, no longer attached to the one who created, fostered or adopted them. What this means in terms of God creating life, is that as soon as God created something, that something had the ability to say "no" to God. Rabbinic scholars like to point out that even before human beings said "no" to God, creation did the same. In verse 24 God says, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures..." Does earth do so? No, earth does not

and so God must do it. In other words, like an intransigent child, even creation was resistant to being directed by God. Even so, creation, creating life, was worth the risk to God. God cared about life so much that God was willing to risk hearing a “no.” This discovery matters to our faith because it says that God is willing to risk showering God’s love and compassion on all of us even if there are those moments we, too, say “no” to God.

Discovery three is that we are not God. I realize that for most of us this is not a new idea. In fact, few of us would probably think of ourselves as God or a god. But there is more to not seeing ourselves as God than merely comprehending the fact that we are part of creation and are not the creator. Even though we may not think of ourselves as gods, we often act like we are. What I mean by this is that we assume we know what is right and true in almost every circumstance. We think we know what the outcomes of all our actions and choices will be. We think that we can see into the future and that all our plans and dreams will come true. In other words, we act like we are God. Or if we do not do these things ourselves, we are more than willing to invest these god-like qualities in others. We are willing to give our allegiance to people and or organizations that claim to be able to save us. We are willing to treat others as if they are micro-gods rather than human beings. This is what happened with Hitler, Stalin, Pol-Pot and Jim Jones; meaning the outcome of such worship of creatures always ended and ends badly. This discovery is critical to our faith because it reminds us that our ultimate allegiance must be to God and God alone.

Discovery four is that we human beings are works in progress. This discovery is one that comes from the sixth day of creation, which is one of the two days of creation that is not said to be “good.” The other day not said to be “good” is day two, which is another matter. To say that something is good doesn’t mean that it is intrinsically good, or beautiful. It means that it is fit for its God given purpose. As we will discover, humanity’s purpose is to love God and neighbor, and to care for creation. By God not declaring human beings as being good, it is a sign that God is not sure that we will be able to fulfill our purposes. In other words, we are going to be works in progress. We are going to be willful creatures who may or may not ever fulfill our potential and purpose. We will always be somewhere on the learning curve of discovering who God desires us to be. Again, this is part of the risk God took in creating us in the first place; that we might not turn out as God intended and desired. This discovery is important to our faith because it reminds us that we are on a journey and that even when we fall short of what we expect of ourselves, or what we believe God expects of us, it is okay because God knows that we are works in progress. And so we are not to give up or be discouraged.

The question then becomes, how do we draw these discoveries together? How do we make sense of them for this day and all our days ahead? My response would be that we go to the very end of the scriptures, to Revelation 21:5 where we read God saying, “*See, I am making all things new.*” A better translation might be, “See I am constantly renewing all life.” In other words, God’s love for life, all life including human life, is so important that God does not sit back and simply observe what is going on, but that God is actively at work helping life reach its full potential. God is at work helping us reach our full human potential. The challenge then is for us to allow God to work in our lives. To allow God to be God and to renew and remake us with each passing day. Here then, is the question I would have you ask. “How am I allowing God to make me new with each passing day so that I might reach the full life God has planned for me?”