

The First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham
“Alive in God’s Creation: What Am I Supposed to See?”
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Genesis 1:1-2:4, Matthew 6:25-34

The scene from The Lion King opens with Pumbaa, Timon and Simba all lying on the grass, after dinner, looking at the stars.

Simba, “I’m stuffed”

Pumbaa, “Me too. I ate like a pig.”

Simba, “You are a pig.”

Pumbaa, “Oh, right.”

They all sigh.

Pumbaa, “Timon...”

Timon, “Yeah?”

Pumbaa, “Have you ever wondered what those sparkling dots are up there?”

Timon, “I don’t wonder. I know.”

Pumbaa, “What are they?”

Timon, “They’re fireflies; fireflies that got stuck up here is that blueish-black thing.”

Pumbaa, “Oh Gee, I always thought that they were balls of gas burning billions of miles away.”

Timon, “Pumbaa, with you, everything is gas.”

Pumbaa, “Simba, what do you think?”

Simba (hesitantly), “Well I don’t know...”

Pumbaa, “Oh come on...give, give, give. We told you ours.”

Simba, “Somebody once told me that the great kings of the past were up there watching over us.”

Timon, “Really. You mean a bunch of royal dead guys are watching us?!”

They all begin to laugh and the scene fades.

The Lion King makes it clear what Pumbaa, Timon and Simba saw when they looked at the stars; when they looked at creation. So what is it that we see, or perhaps what is it that we are supposed to see when we look at creation. I ask because just like these three friends, human beings across the last ten-thousand years or so have seen many different things when they looked at creation. Like Simba, many saw gods, goddesses or ancestors living in the sky, the sun, the moon, the trees and the plants. Others, Like Pumbaa, looked at creation and saw a mechanical universe which was like a pocket watch, all wound up and running eternally on a set of mechanistic principles; principles that today we learn about in physics such as gravity, electromagnetism, strong force and weak force. Still others, like Timon (who saw the stars as his food source) saw creation as a giant piggy bank of minerals and materials waiting to be exploited for the money that could be made, regardless of the consequences. And the materials were not simply what one could take out of the earth, but were the human beings that were to be enslaved, used up and then cast aside. Others saw only awe and beauty, a gift to be explored and about which one could write great music and produce amazing works of art. But what is it that we, the people of the Book; the

people of God in Jesus Christ are to see, when we look at creation? The answer is twofold, and both answers can be found in this morning's lesson from the opening of the chapter of Genesis.

First we are to see creation as God's creation. The writer of Genesis 1 makes it clear that the universe and everything in it is God's. Now to be clear we as Presbyterians are not Creationists. We don't believe that Genesis either explains the mechanics of creation...the actual how it was made, or give us an exact timeline for the creation event. Even so, what it affirms is that God was somehow mysteriously behind all of this; all of creation; all of life. Whether that life came through God casting a seed of energy at the Big Bang that was filled with the potential and possibility of life, or whether God insured that the potential for life became the reality of life doesn't matter to the writer. What matters is that God is the creating force behind this creation. The writer also reminds us that God created all that there is but that God cared and cares for all that there is. God said that it was good and very good. In a sense whatever God creates, God cares about. When we look at this creation then the first thing we should see is that it is God's; that it is God's very good creation.

Second, we should see it as our creation. When I say that I don't mean that it is ours as a possession. Even though many people have and will read Genesis that way; that we are to have an exploitative dominion over creation, that is not the essence of the Hebrew. The original wording of dominion refers to the dominion of a king who guides and protects his people. It is the dominion of a shepherd who cares for the sheep. Walter Brueggemann implies that the image we ought to use in understanding dominion is that of Jesus who lays down his life for his sheep. In other words, the dominion we are to have entails a responsibility for the creation; so it is our creation because we are the ones whom God has tasked with taking care of it. This is in fact the meaning of the image of God. The image of someone, say a king, referred to the authority given to an individual who was commissioned by the king to serve in the king's place when the king could not be present. Thus when God addresses humanity in these opening verses of Genesis, God is saying that this is our creation to care for, nurture and assist in becoming the wonderful, awe filled place that God created it to be.

These understandings lead us to two conclusions. First they lead us to become those who care for and appreciate the environment, which is appropriate this year as we celebrate the Centennial of our National Parks. This is in some ways an obvious outcome. The second is a conclusion that we might miss; but fortunately Jesus points it out to us...and that is that we get to live a life of "hakuna matata", or a life where there are no worries here. (And by the way, even though most of you probably heard this phrase first in the Lion King, it is a phrase used by Kenyans). We hear Jesus saying this to those who had gathered around him for what we call the Sermon on the Mount. He asks them why they worry about life, clothes or food and then implies that they need not worry. This is a remarkable ask considering how difficult life was in the first century. People were small farmers scratching out a living. They were day laborers hoping to get hired in order to feed their families. They were small merchants who were heavily taxed and who might be robbed at any turn on the road. So how could Jesus tell them to live by Hakuna Matata? He could do so because this is God's and our creation. Jesus reminds them that in God's creation God not only takes care of the birds of the air and the grass of the field, but God takes care of those who are made in God's image. Jesus says, "Are you not of more value than they?" Thus Jesus says, God will take care of the needs of human beings and so they do not need to worry.

In our study book, *We Make the Road by Walking*, the author speaks of the awe and wonder that we should experience when we view God's creation. Like many of you there have been many times in my life when the beauty around me has left me virtually speechless. Yet for me, the greatest aspect of awe and wonder, is that the God who created the heavens and the earth, cares so deeply for this creation and for all of us in it; for every bird, and tree and human being who draws breath, that God will work that we have all that we need, now and always.

My challenge for you then for this week is this, to ask yourselves, where do I see awe and wonder in God's creation and how am I fulfilling my role as one who has been created in the image of God?