

“The Human Story: Beginning, Fall, and Redemption”

Genesis 2:7-17

Sermon for the Seventh Sunday after Trinity 2022; July 31, 2022

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

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In the reading from Genesis 2 this morning, God’s word takes us to where the human story began. From that beginning, it describes the human struggle in the knowledge of good and evil. Then we see Jesus feeding the crowd of four thousand as the Redeemer.

It began with this: “[T]he LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7).

God’s word refers to God here as the “LORD God.” In Hebrew this is Yahweh Elohim. Yahweh is the personal name for God that stems from God’s answer to Moses at the burning bush: “I am who I am.” God told Moses to tell the people of Israel that “I am” has sent you to them (Exodus 3:14). With this name God is saying this: “I always am. I always exist. I just am existence or let us say life. I am always there. I am always near, nearer and closer to you than you can imagine or sense.” This is both a reality and a promise. Our English translations of the Bible bring Yahweh into English with the word “Lord” in large and small capitals.

The word Elohim is also used in Genesis 1:1: “In the beginning *God* created the heavens and the earth. What does this word “God” indicate? It indicates the supreme, the absolute; the absolute good; the absolute in power and authority. It indicates the almighty and the source of all things.

It is the LORD God that formed Adam, the man of dust, from the ground: God supreme, and absolute, and almighty. Yet, it was also Yahweh the covenant God. This makes God’s relation to us personal and intimate. It also tells us that Yahweh is God, supreme, absolute, almighty, the one true God.

The LORD God formed Adam from the dust of the ground. The word “formed” paints a picture. You could think here of what an artist who works with clay does when he or she makes something out of a lump of clay (Isaiah 29:16). Think of the tender care, the artistry, the attention to detail. Isaiah the prophet uses this word in the sense of planning, when he says: “Have you not heard that I determined it long ago? I *planned* from days of old what now I bring to pass” (Isaiah 37:26 ESV). God did not create us hap-hazardly, but with purpose and supreme skill, with beauty and grace.

So when God’s word says that the LORD God formed Adam, it speaks of the LORD using the artistry and tender care of the potter in forming the clay. It also speaks of the precision, order, and attention to detail of engineering and planning: both. It is also “hands-on” not far away. It is a work in concrete reality, not an abstraction. You are not an abstraction, lost in a class. This is how the LORD God made Adam. This is how the LORD God makes every human being.

But there was something more the LORD God needed to do to make Adam a living being. Up to this point, Adam is just clay. He is not alive. So the LORD God breathed into Adam’s nostrils, that is, his nose (Genesis 2:7). He breathed life into him, spirit. Then Adam came alive and became a living being.

There is much more to us human beings than just matter and chemicals. Matter and chemicals cannot be alive on their own terms. Matter and chemicals cannot create biological life. To assert that they can is a category mistake. But we live. We are alive. Our being alive cannot be fully accounted for just in terms of matter and chemicals. Thus, it cannot be fully accounted

for without God.

But we must also say this. In us human beings matter and spirit are so deeply inter-twined and inter-connected that neither philosophy, nor logic, nor science can discern where and how they are joined together; where one ends and the other begins. This is remarkable and profound. As the human creature you are, you are remarkable and profound. We ourselves, in the way God created us, are way beyond the capacity of philosophy and science to grasp.

This breathing spirit into us is also more than just a principle of being alive. It is full of meaning, purpose, and intention, and the potential for knowledge and creativity. It is also moral. It was goodness and truth, love and justice, righteous and holy. This is fitting since it is the LORD God who breathed this spirit into Adam.

The LORD God forms every human being. God's word says: "The LORD, Yahweh, stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him" (Zechariah 12:1). It says elsewhere: "The LORD, Yahweh, forms the eye" (Psalm 94:9). We can expand this thought to every part of our bodies. But to make us now He uses means.

The LORD's work in creating us is summed up beautifully in these words from Psalm 139: "For you created my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them" (Psalm 139:13-16).

Adam was formed immediately by the LORD God; So was Eve. we are formed by God in our mother's wombs as children of Adam in the nature of Adam. So we also bear Adam's corruption of rebellion and unbelief, selfishness and pride, weakness and mortality, passed down to us in God's wisdom through our fathers.

The LORD God planted a garden and put Adam there to work it and tend it (Genesis 2:15). Actually when the English says that God "put" Adam there, the word "put" means to cause to be settled or at rest. It is talking about being home. The garden was Adam's, our, original home. There seems to be a longing for that home now lost that haunts humanity; a longing to return, to find it again. But there is no going back. The second Adam, our Savior, turns the haunting into the glorious hope of the new creation in Him. Paradise is ahead of us.

The LORD God planted a whole bunch of trees in the garden. These trees were delightful to look at and good for food. God is not the enemy of pleasures. He wants them to be used, however, according to His truth and goodness and not treated as supreme, that is, not to replace Him and His word as the ultimate good.

Among the abundance of these trees, the LORD God planted two other trees: the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This knowledge here is not just about knowing something. It is also about experiencing it. It is the tree that brings the experience of "good and evil." This fundamentally describes our human experience.

In this, the LORD God treated Adam with dignity, as more than just an animal. He created Adam a moral being. He also created Adam for faith in God to trust Him. He also created Adam with the ability to think, that is, to discern what God was saying to him and make judgements between right and wrong, faith and unbelief, true teaching and false teaching, based on what God was saying in the midst of Adam's surroundings.

So God gave Adam a command in human speech. God invented speech and our capacity for it. God communicates to us in it and through it. "You may eat of all of the trees of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17).

Why a tree? Why not give some profound abstract moral concept like, you shall exercise justice? It is because faith and trusting in God's command and therefore yielding to God as God is not an abstraction. It takes on concrete form and action. Adam, do you want to show how you believe in Me and trust Me as your life and highest good? Then don't eat from this tree. In my abundant goodness and generosity, I have given all of these other trees to you, just not this one. Trust me and exercise faith by not eating of this tree.

All of God's commandments come into our lives in such concrete form and action.

We know from the story that Adam ate of this tree. This happened as the evil one tempted Eve, his wife, made from his own flesh, and she ate. Then Eve put the fruit before Adam's eyes and he ate. She did this with whatever authority and power of sentimental feeling and personal loyalty that Adam would have had for her. He made his feelings for her supreme; he made her God. Doing this with anyone ultimately becomes bitter.

The temptation was also personal to them both: you will be like God, when you eat what God has forbidden. In the pursuit of this temptation, Adam and Eve experienced the evil that comes with the eating of fruit in disregarding God's command, in falling from faith, in falling into rebellion and disobedience, in making oneself supreme instead of the Supreme One and His word. And we have known such good and bitter evil ever since, and the havoc and destruction it brings. We know it ultimately in death.

Then one day, the LORD God stood there on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. His name is Jesus. And up in the hills above the Sea there was a huge crowd gathered to hear Him speak God's word, more than four thousand sons and daughters of Adam. They were hungry. There were no resources there to buy bread and other food.

Jesus' disciples had seven loaves of bread and a few fish. Jesus told the crowd to sit down on the grass. He took the seven loaves. He blessed them. All of God's blessings come to us from Him. Having blessed them, He broke them so that the disciples could distribute it to the people to eat. They all ate and were satisfied.

He, Jesus, is the LORD God who formed Adam to be a living creature. He Himself was present in the form of the living creature. He came to us as one of us. He has come to feed us with the bread we need. He shows us this in the bread He provided miraculously that day for the nourishment of the body. He Himself is the bread given for the ultimate nourishment we need; the healing from the knowledge of good and evil; the healing from sin that involves making ourselves and pleasures supreme; the healing from death. He does this so that we can know the eating of the tree of life.

As the living creature, He took the penalty of eating the forbidden fruit into Himself when He died under punishment. God's judgement as the penalty was satisfied in His death, for He died as the representative Man for all human beings; He did not ever eat the forbidden fruit. As the LORD God, the author of life, He takes life again to give us life in Him.

And as the obedience to God's command found concrete expression for faith to exercise itself in not eating from the particular tree, so also Jesus feeds us on redemption and forgiveness and living forever in Him in concrete ways. He gives the word of the Gospel. He gives the word of forgiveness spoken to contrite hearts. He gives the washing away of sins and new birth in Him in the water combined with God's word. He feeds us with the bread of life He is and the blood of redemption shed by Him in the consecrated bread and wine of Holy Communion, within the congregation of Christ's people who are gathered by Him, for Him, and in His name.

We rejoice in how we have been made and in the LORD God as our Creator. We also rejoice in Jesus as the LORD God who has come among us as one of us and has redeemed us in the

giving of Himself. He did this in the intimate love and care of the potter shaping the clay. Let us abandon our claims to deity in humble repentance toward God and follow Jesus in redemption to the new creation in the forgiveness of sins. Amen.