

Season after Pentecost
Garden of Eden
Narrative Lectionary Year 2, Week 1
September 13, 2015
Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD
Readings: Psalm: 8: 1, 3-9; Genesis 2: 4b-25

Grace and peace to you from God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit –Amen

You can come to some wild conclusion from data. People have been known to interpret evidence in ways to fit their conclusions, while others take it a little too far beyond reason. Take for example the British scientists who reported, in 2010, that after having dug to a depth of ten feet they found traces of copper wire dating back 200 years. They concluded that their ancestors already had a telephone network more than 150 years ago. Not to be outdone, the New York Times reported: “[After digging to a depth of 20 feet] American archaeologists, finding traces of 250 year old copper wire, concluded that their ancestors had an advanced high-tech communications network 100 years earlier than the British.” One week later, the state’s Department of Minerals and Energy in Western Australia, reported the following: “After digging as deep as 30 feet in Western Australia’s Pilbara region, Jack Lucknow, a self-taught archaeologist, reported that he found absolutely nothing. Jack has therefore concluded that 250 years ago, Australia had already gone wireless.”¹

Misinterpretations and unfound explanations can happen when you dig into the Bible, too. The Bible is actually a library of books that has been our primary source of what God wants us to know about God’s self and our relationship to God: Father-Son-Holy Spirit. It is the inspired Word of God recorded by human beings in particular times with particular unfolding circumstances which reveals our Almighty, loving Lord and our God’s intentional, persistent effort to save us and all creation from the mess we’ve made of our relationships and world. Despite its revelatory nature, the Bible is not an easy book to excavate. You’re digging through several layers of translations, sifting through material written long ago, by people living in totally different time, who experienced cultures that are still mostly mystery to us. The bumper sticker: “The Bible said it. I believe it. That settles it,” may be clever but it’s just not accurate. The Bible requires interpretation and reinterpretation to dig out its meaning and applications for situations its original audience never imagined. The Bible was never intended to be a science resource. It was never meant to be an “only the facts, Ma’am” history book. Its God’s Word that is meant to engage us, draw us in and draw us toward our Lord as we seek its wisdom and insight.

Consider the reading we heard this morning from the second chapter of Genesis. It is a creation story. It follows the first creation story in chapter 1. So first you puzzle about the fact there are two creation stories in the Bible. In our linear or scientific way of thinking that's impossible. One must be right and the other wrong. But wait, they are both in the Bible. It's only the second chapter of the Bible and already there's confusion! But the source of that confusion is that we are looking at creation stories as factual, historical, scientific descriptions of how the earth came about. The Hebrews who told these stories for generations and later wrote them down never intended them to be blueprints for creation. They intended them to be a theological declaration or better put, a profession of faith. Each creation story was meant to proclaim to their descendants and surrounding neighbors something essential about their one true God. Why two rather than one? Because together they did a better job of it — each professed God to be the creator but each revealed different truths about God, us and the created world.

If you look at the story in the second chapter of Genesis as a statement of faith, what do you see it saying about God? This is where I would have a class call out what they notice and write it on the board. Here is what I might hear: God is Creator of all; God is a hands-on, down in the dirt Creator, breathing his own breath of life into the human; God created with great thought and orderliness; God provided the human with a vocation — the care and nurturing of the Garden; God was generous allowing the human to eat freely from every tree but one; God is compassionate – God worried about the man being alone, the only one of his species; God gave humans a part in the handiwork of creation when the man was allowed to name the animal; God created woman to bring completeness to the human species; God intended each human to live in companionship and community, equally valued for their complementary, differing gifts.

Can you see it? This creation story offers a picture of God as one who stands apart and above the many other gods worshiped by the neighbors of the Hebrews. No, you will not find out how dinosaurs fit into God's creation plan. No, you will not get a clearer definition of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and why God created it in the first place. No, you will not get an explanation of how the world could become populated from only two humans, whose children would have to marry one another. Why? Because that wasn't the concern of those who recorded this creation story. If you stop dwelling on what you **can't** know and start focusing on what **is** being revealed in Scripture, you will find great nourishment for your faith. Lifted up in Genesis 2 is our God who is all-powerful but not distant or uncaring . . . Our God who created all things and wants all humans and

creation to prosper in goodness and health . . . you find our God who cares about the well-being of each of us and who called us to care about the well-being of all humans and creation, too . . . Our God who cared enough to set limits and would not abandon us when we disobeyed.

The Bible is to be approached with both reverence and curiosity. But we mustn't let our fear of being baffled or getting it wrong keep us from the wealth of insight, love and hope God's Word has to offer. Today, during his baptism, Charlie's parents, sponsors and this congregation will promise to put the Word of God in his hands. Later, at confirmation or when we affirm our own baptismal promises, we renew the promise that the Word of God will be an active part of our lives. Sometimes we need to be reminded of the promises we have made. While we need to be careful that we don't twist God's Word or skip the parts we don't like, our promise to take God's Word seriously remains. We are intended to fearlessly wonder and wander in God's Word ---- poking, inquiring, considering possibilities and filtering any conclusion through the God revealed in Jesus, other parts of the Bible and our community of faith. When you step over the fear, studying the Bible with others is fun, intriguing, at times, frustrating but always rewarding.

I recommend you pick up a devotional booklet or sign-up to receive a daily devotion on line. If available, come to the Wednesday 10 a.m. Bible study starting at the end of the month. Write on the back of your attendance form a day and time you could come for a four or six week Bible study. Opportunities for adults to regularly dig into God's Word and be re-energized by it is one of the essentials I, we have let slip here at Haven. Let's make a decision to step into the mystery of God's Word. Let's make each other a promise that we will choose to attend at least one 4-6 week Bible Study in the 2015-16 program year. We will see a difference in our community. Because when you let the Word of God be grafted into your very fiber, you will become more fully who you are — a child of God, fashioned by the Creator, filled with the breath of a Living Lord, and marked by the cross of Christ forever. Amen.

Linda M Alessandri 9/12/15

ENDNOTE

1."Aussie Common Sense" posted by Sermon Central Staff on www.sermoncentral.com, citing its origin in a sermon by John Perry entitled "The Unusual Gift of Common Sense" 1/22/2011