

“Creation:...and it was VERY good”

aka “It’s ALL Good!”

First UMC Pasadena

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This morning, Jonathan Webster read Genesis 1:27-2:2, picking up in the Creation story where Dr. Trotter left off in his sermon last week. Not meaning to reiterate the creation story, but I’m not sure how many of you Biblical scholars know that there is more than one Creation story in the Bible? Both are in Genesis. I have translated another version of this text.

In The Beginning¹

In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth. And the Earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.

And Satan said, "It doesn't get any better than this."

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit," and God saw that it was good.

And Satan said, "There goes the neighborhood."

And God said, "Let us make Man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air and over the cattle, and over all the Earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the Earth." And so God created Man in his own image; male and female created he them. And God looked upon Man and Woman and saw that they were lean and fit.

And Satan said, "I know how I can get back in this game."

And God populated the earth with broccoli and cauliflower and spinach, green and yellow vegetables of all kinds, so Man and Woman would live long and healthy lives.

And Satan created McDonald's. And McDonald's brought forth the 99-cent double cheeseburger.

And Satan said to Man, "You want fries with that?"

¹ *God Jokes*, http://digitaldreamdoor.nutsie.com/pages/quotes/God_jokes.html, Internet Accessed 20 September 20, 2009.

And Man said, "Supersize them." And Man gained 5 pounds.

And God created the healthful yogurt, that woman might keep her figure that man found so fair.

And Satan brought forth chocolate. And Woman gained 5 pounds.

And God said, "Try my crispy fresh salad."

And Satan brought forth Ben and Jerry's. And Woman gained 10 pounds.

And God said, "I have sent thee heart-healthy vegetables and olive oil with which to cook them."

And Satan brought forth the [*Claim-Jumper's*] chicken-fried steak so big it needed its own platter.

And Man gained 10 pounds and his bad cholesterol went through the roof.

And God brought forth running shoes and Man resolved to lose those extra pounds.

And Satan brought forth cable TV with remote control so Man would not have to toil to change channels between ESPN and ESPN2.

And Man gained another 20 pounds.

And God said, "You're running up the score, Devil." And God brought forth the potato, a vegetable naturally low in fat and brimming with nutrition.

And Satan peeled off the healthful skin and sliced the starchy center into chips and deep-fat fried them. And he created sour cream dip also.

And Man clutched his remote control and ate the potato chips swaddled in cholesterol. And Satan saw and said, "It is good."

And Man went into cardiac arrest.

And God sighed and created quadruple bypass surgery.

And Satan created HMO's.

Ok, perhaps that's not the true GENESIS Creation story, (the second story is in Genesis 2:4-24), but today we're hoping to strive for the original understanding of the Creation

Story where God took a look around and said, "It was all VERY good." We are seeking to find our linkage between our kinship with Creation and with God and how we can make it "VERY good with God." Let us think on these things, let us pray.

"Let the words of my mouth...and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer." Amen.

How many of you have heard the term: "It's all good!" before? Perhaps you've heard variations of, "It's all good?" Maybe you've heard: "It's all good in the hood," or "It's all cool in the pool," or "It's all gravy"? In Hawai'i, you hear more often than not: "It's awwwwwwright!"

In the Urban Slang dictionary I found MANY definitions of "It's all good." Here are a few of my favorites:

1. it's all good: Despite any possible doubt, everything's cool.
Example: "Oh, you just crashed my car? It's all good, homie!"

2. it's all good: Means nothing is bad. Used in an optimistic sense to show the lightheartedness of something.
Example: "Hey man, sorry about that. I had someone on the other line."
"Oh it's all good."

3. it's all good: Everyone/ Everything is cool. Whoever you are/ Wherever you're from, you're alright with me.
For example: East visiting the West:
E: "I'm from the East-side of town."
W: "It's all good. You're welcome here."

The definitions are all good, right? So right now, I want to practice the "It's ALL good" with you this morning, just so we get the hang of it. This way, we'll close the generation gap once and for all and have everyone speaking the same language. I'll need your help. If you agree with these statements and affirm them, instead of saying, "It was very good," since it's easier, I want you to shout out, "It's All Good." Can you do that for me? Let's do this:

1. And on the first day, God created the heavens and the earth. And the people said:
IT'S ALL GOOD!
2. And God said, "Let there be Light!" and the people said: IT'S ALL GOOD!
3. And God created the sky and the sea! And the people said: IT'S ALL GOOD!

Good! You're getting the hang of it!

4. And on the 3rd, 4th, and 5th days, God created the land and plants. Night and Day.
And the animals of the sea. And the people said: IT'S ALL GOOD!
5. And on the 6th day, God decided to make land animals—including humans (with
full health coverage). And the people said: IT'S ALL GOOD!
6. And on the 7th day, God got to rest. And the people said: IT'S ALL GOOD!

You all were VERY good!

And what does the Bible say about Creation being: ALL GOOD? Early on, you hear that everything that God created was "good." God approved. But in Genesis 1:31, the author (some believe was Moses) says that God saw everything that he had made and indeed it was VERY good.

Some people² think that God was referring to man when God made the declaration "very good." But it certainly looks like in addition to the creation of man, it was EVERYTHING that was ALL VERY GOOD. The entire creation from the Heavens and earth, light and sky, water and earth, stars and birds, fish and animals, and people (Adam, made from the earth) were all necessary for everything to be considered complete. So as I

² Verse Bible Commentary on Genesis 1:31, <http://www.vbvbc.org/bible-verse/genesis1-31>, Internet Accessed 19 September 2009.

wondered what were the differences between good and VERY good, I turned to other theological discussions on “the degrees of goodness?”

It is noted that, “it was good” occurs six times in Genesis 1.verses 4,10,12,18,21,25, yet it is not written that “it was good” after each day of creation (for instance, you don’t see it in the 2nd day of creation). But we do notice that before the woman was created, God had said, “It is not good that the man should be alone....” in Genesis.2:18. So once woman was created, then God checked out all he had created and THEN said “behold it is VERY good.” (I think the Bible gave a little shout out for the women there!) And so to God, creation was ALL GOOD in every way. And it is in this creation that we recognize the brilliance and wisdom of God throughout the Bible, throughout history, throughout our lives.

We may forget how *good* we have it, but it really is all good. Sometimes we forget to stop and enjoy the creation that God made. We are constantly reminded of Creation in the changing of seasons, the new life of plants, and the birth of babies, and a part of creation that we are still struggling to accept...Creation dying. But if we aren’t careful, if we don’t step up and take responsibility for creation, we could just as easily lose it.

And for this reason we used both the Creation story in Genesis and the New Testament lesson from the James 3-4 texts. In today’s Genesis story, God said it was VERY good. Seeking some biblical understanding of why we, as humans were created as the last and most God-conscious creation, we look to James in his asking, “Who is wise and

understanding among you? Show by your *good* life that your works are done with gentleness.” The book of James had just finished talking about Faith and Works and now questions our humanity and the human condition... “Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish.” He goes on to talk about envy and selfish ambition that follows up with disorder and wickedness. James tells us that the wisdom that we seek is “from above—first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those make peace.”--(so many images of Creation) As James asks us to submit to God, we are reminded that we are a part of God’s creation and to live as God wants us to live, that it is up to us to first decide how we want to live, to make conscious decisions to make the best of the wisdom that was given to us, and to return that usage to our responsibility to God’s creation.

I think we talk a good talk about respecting God’s creation and taking steps to make this a better world, but yet, we read everyday in the newspaper or watch on the news how our air quality in California is so poor, particularly in the areas by our ports and where truck drivers park, so that the rate of childhood asthma is higher in those areas. We see how rainforests are being slashed and burned to supply *our* needs. We see infomercials on children around the world dying of hunger and poverty. Dolphins caught in tuna fishing lines, stories about endangered animals and plants. God-created human beings fighting wars between other God-created human beings.

But if these things don't affect us personally in our homes, we don't always notice. What is God asking us to do? God's creation is so big, so vast. We are just part of the creation...but God created us, so we ARE good. As a part of the bigger creation we can be ALL VERY GOOD.

I am probably less of a cynic than the next. My created predisposition has always been to air on the side of the optimist. So I am a true believer that living in God's ALL GOOD Creation starts with one person who is willing to make eco-conscious or social and world-conscious decisions to make a change—and that can start a movement which can better not only our lives, but all those in God's creation.

Before I came to Pasadena, one of my former congregants was a young entrepreneur who was starting up a company. His vision and goal was that the Ethos & Mission of his company would be a 3-point practice (believing that “you are what you wear”). Chris was starting up a clothing line...a clothing line with an impact that would create a chain reaction that would be contagious even if you were a bystander looking at the design on someone shirts. Here was Chris' 3-point practice: It's all about self-empowerment, the environment, and inspiration.

His Mission and Ethos of the workplace reads:

“What good would change be if the place of change were compromised? Our environment has been compromised throughout history; and our society needs to come to the realization that we are depleting our resources and are too caught up in the mentality

of "by any means necessary". The development of consciousness can initiate change -- ultimately creating a better existence for us, our children, and many generations to come.

The clothing industry also has been exploiting and depleting resources, and practicing inefficient and environmentally unfriendly methods. From pesticides to labor conditions to careless operations, these things are causing an eco-overkill. The textile industry must realize and reformat to new innovative methods as it holds an important role in the effect on the environment.

He uses Aristotle's in saying "Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom." His 2nd point in Self-empowerment states:

"We firmly believe that change begins within each individual. Self-identity is the precursor towards change in our society and environment; everything starts with the self. [We] will strive to remind consumers about the fundamental importance of self-awareness and the power of positive energy. To create purpose and change, the mind, body, and soul must be in harmony.

And he is inspired:

"Inspiration is a vital factor in the ability to empower one's self and finds motivation to help create change and make our environment a top priority. Healthy living is a healthy world. Through positive and inspirational symbolism, We will push to create awareness through design and fashion. If we find inspiration in ourselves, we can inspire. If we can

inspire, we can give birth to change. If change is born, we prosper, and back to alpha...it's organically cyclical.”

Perhaps his organic goods and products may seem simple, but it is in his living that he exhibits and models this type of inspirational wisdom. His charitable donations and time that he dedicated to the church was phenomenal and his support of what needs to be done in the community, go above and beyond what we think we should be doing. It's no surprise his company is called “All Good Living.”³

In the last year, I have become more impressed at the members of the congregation who have really stepped forward and talked about wanting to create a “Green” atmosphere here at First UMC Pasadena. We have to understand that when J.P. Harris does a stewardship moment, he isn't always talking about money (sometimes, but not always ☺). He's talking about being GOOD STEWARDS. He's talking about ALL of the ways that we can be *all good* for God.

After Time and Talent Saturday, it was recognized that Stewardship also meant being good stewards of our church, of our community, of our earth, of our creation. Early on, we have had dedicated youth who have a passion for “being Green.” Nicole Lussier bowled me over this summer with her bright enthusiasm about how we can make First Pasadena *all good* in creating a strong Youth Green Team, selling organic produce...and now introducing the congregation to recycling in your own homes—from eliminating plastic waste to using recyclable bags and water bottles. Stay tuned for next Sunday's

³ All Good Living, <http://www.allgood-living.com/index.html>

announcements on what's up next for the Youth Green Team. Just yesterday, six FUMC Youth joined the Pasadena District Youth in their 1st Annual GREENFEST event. It is an exciting time.

From our Christian Education committees to our Worship, and Evangelism and Outreach committees, we are caring for God's creation spiritually and watching out for the well-being of others. And this follows in the vain of so much that we do here at First UMC. Our Missions, Peace & Justice committee serves God's creation by reminding us that we all need to go out of these doors and serve others. When we extend our worshipping community by inviting all our kin in creation to celebrate with us, it is all good. When the psalmist teaching us to praise God for creation but also worship with our kin in creation, it is ALL GOOD! When we are also conscious of relating to other creatures as our kin—including the earth, we KNOW that God says that it is ALL GOOD! We think that these are such small ways that we can make a difference in God's Creation, but in totality, it is ALL good!

In Rainbow Spirit Theology (kind of like a new creation spirituality movement), an excerpt from Patrick Dodson reminds us that:

“The land is a living place made up of sky, clouds, rivers, trees, the wind, the sand; and the Spirit has placed my own spirit there in my own country. It is something—and yet it is not a thing—it is a living entity. It belongs to me. I belong to it. I rest in it. I come from there. (Rainbow Spirit Elders, p. 32)”

On Friday, at our Youth afterschool Shadow Program, I became engaged in a conversation with Gabi Vogt (Marlene Farrell's granddaughter) and her friend Juan about creation and if they believed that God created the universe in 7 days. Gabi said, "Um, I think that to God, 7 days was probably like 7 months." And Juan chimed in, "Or maybe a 7 million years!" But however long God metaphorically or literally created the world, we as part of God's creations know that, "It's ALL good!"

A Very Amen and Amen.

BENEDICTION:

Go out of the doors of First Pasadena UMC aware of God empowering you to go out into creation to live wisely and responsibly.

And the people of God said, "It's All Good!"

Go out of the doors of First Pasadena knowing that God inspires us to go beyond ourselves and to make changes that better our environment and others.

And the people of God said, "It's All Good!"

Go out of these doors today skipping, shouting, singing, dancing, however you do it, go out and appreciate the beauty of God's Creation!

And the people of God said, "It's All Good!"