

Sermon: "Creation, Cooperation, and Connection"

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SCRIPTURE

Genesis 2: 18-24

18 Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.' ¹⁹So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man* there was not found a helper as his partner. ²¹So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²²And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

²³Then the man said,

'This at last is bone of my bones

and flesh of my flesh;

this one shall be called Woman,*

for out of Man* this one was taken.'

²⁴Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

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On this World Communion Sunday, we hear the second Creation story. This one does not assign days to God's work or even have God calling the work of creation good. Rather we hear a story of creation, cooperation, and connection. It's really quite poetic.

God created the earth, then a stream, but no vegetation. Then God created man from the earth. Imagine for a moment God, the Master Gardener, reaching down into the dust, into the soil, the earth, to form a human being. Then God breathed life into the nostrils of that first human. Before the plants of the soil, animals of the earth, birds of the air, and fish of the sea, God created the human creature and personally breathed life into his nostrils. How intimate!

Out of that same ground, God created a garden with three rivers. And God placed the man in that garden in Eden to till and keep it. God was relying on this human to tend to the garden. It was the beginning of a relationship that had started out with God's breathing life into this being. God creating. Human tending.

While God had not said anything in this second creation story about creation being good, God did say, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.' God knew that it was important for human beings to be in relationship. God made humans to need another person.

Then God created all creatures of the land and sea, from the same soil that God had made the human. The human and all other creatures shared that same earthly beginning. And God paraded each creature before the person so the man could give each creature a name – dog, cat, horse, bird, butterfly, bumble bee, cow, turtle, elephant, and more... But from all the creatures that God made, the man could not find a creature to be his helper and partner. Now I don't know if you are a dog person or a cat person but neither of these animals was a fitting choice to be man's helper/partner. Despite how much we love them, they didn't fit the bill. But think about the cooperation – God designing and creating animals in all shapes and sizes, fish of all colors, and birds with different songs and the human at God's side naming them.

Then God had another idea. He put the man into a deep sleep and removed one of his ribs. From that, he created another human. A woman. And the man was satisfied. Actually, he sounded thrilled, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.' Man had another human to be close to; as close as his flesh, as close as his bones, as connected as possible. God had created both of them. It sounds idyllic. God, the man, the woman were all connected to one another.

Now, being the nerd that I am, I have to inject a little translation into this story of creation, cooperation, and connection. It's important because this lovely story has been used in not lovely ways over time. In her Bible commentary, Lisa Wolfe explains that the Hebrew - *ha-adam*, "the human" is used in Genesis 2:7 where God made "*ha-adam*, "the human" out of *ha-adamah*, "the earth." We might even call that human, "earthling." It's a "gender inclusive" term. Later, in verse 23 the Hebrew word is "*ish* 'man' which means a male human. It comes after the human has his rib removed. And we hear "*ishah*" which means "woman, wife," And she writes "The two words providing poetic balance in 2:23 and illustrating the similarity of the differentiated beings built from *ha-adam*." She further explains that while we have used the word "rib" as the body site from which the woman came, the word "*tesla*" is actually side, translated "one of his sides." It's the same word that is translated as "side" or "chamber" of the sanctuary in Exodus and 1 Kings. In Genesis the translation would be that the Lord "built the side that he took from the human into a woman."

And finally, Wolfe addresses the understanding of "helper as his partner," (from verses 18 and 20), the Hebrew "*ezer kenegdo*." When the term *ezer* appears in the Hebrew Bible, it usually refers to God. In 1 Samuel 7:12, Samuel erects a stone monument where God helped Israel, and thus names the place "Ebenezer," or "stone (*eben*) of help (*ezer*)." ¹ Not only is God the helper in 1 Samuel, God is also the helper in the psalms. In Psalm 10, the psalmist says to God, "you have been the helper of the orphan." In Psalm 30, the psalmist asks, "O LORD, be my helper!" And in Psalm 54, the psalmist declares, "But surely, God is my helper;".

¹ Commentary on Genesis 2: 18-24, in "Working Preacher," found at https://www.workingpreacher.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/wolfe_lisa_2019

So why did I leave this poetic creation story to discuss translations? Well, over time, this beautiful and creative passage describing the relationship between God and the first humans has been taken to mean that man is superior and that the woman was meant to be subservient. However, when we look at translations we might consider that the first “man” was a human being, and that man and woman were formed when God made that human go into a deep sleep.

The understanding that the first woman was “the helper” has been used to justify keeping women under control of men. However when thinking of woman as helper and along with the understanding that God is the helper in other books of scripture, we realize that helper is not subservient. And when we think about the translation of the word “side” in scripture as referring to the side of the temple, we understand that this is a sign of strength. So the woman, the “helper as his partner,” would be strong and a helper like the one who is our helper, God. Our God made the woman from the man to so that they were more closely connected to each other than to any other of God’s creatures, to be in relationship and equals. This is hardly subservient.

Returning to the passage, in it we see God creating all creatures from the same earth. The beauty of this passage is in the relationship between God, humans, and all of creation. We are all connected. The beauty is that connection between individuals and all creation; caring for and helping the earth and one another. And if we continue the story, we hear that Adam and Eve were naked but not ashamed. We even hear that God walked in the Garden. The couple was so intimately connected with God and each other that they were not even embarrassed to be naked.

More than the first creation story, this second creation story weaves a story of relationship. It’s a love story with God in the midst of it all, creating and inviting the human to be involved in part of the creation process. And God also recognized that it was not good for humans to “be alone.” But not just any creature would be a proper fit for a human. So God formed another human; physically formed the woman from the man’s rib or side, from the flesh and bone.

The God who desired a relationship with those first humans, and understood that humans need each other, continues to desire relationships. God desires a personal relationship with people and for people to be in relationship with one another. God desired that so much that God became human and spent a lifetime walking and living with humans as Jesus. And if we believe that God is still loving, speaking, and creating, we are still part of that process.

As followers of Jesus, Emanuel, God with Us, we are called to work in relationship with God and each other. And today we celebrate World Communion Sunday. We reflect on our connection with Christians across the globe who also share this sacrament and the desire of all Christians to follow Jesus. We share a belief in Jesus. We share Christ’s table, where all are welcome. We share a call to become bread for one another - feeding and nourishing one another. We are called to cooperate with God in tending and caring for one another. We are called to love.

On this World Communion Sunday our table looks a little different. Representing the diversity of Christians we have different breads and beverages. We have a French baguette, naan from India, and matza to remind us of unleavened bread of the Jewish people. And we have brown multigrain bread representing the diversity of the many who are called to become one and to become bread for one another.

We have coke, representing those living in rural villages in Ghana do not have access to wine for Communion. For their Communion they use Coca Cola. In a poor community, people cannot afford to drink Coke regularly. So this beverage is special, like a delicacy, and truly appreciated when it is received at the Communion table. And we have spiced wine, representing the Pentecostal Church of Chile, a UCC Global Ministries partner of the UCC. As Pentecostal Christians they do not drink any alcohol. But it's difficult to get grape juice. So women cook the wine to burn off the alcohol, then add spices.

Today we celebrate World Communion Sunday, a celebration of the sacrament we share with Christians across denominations and cultures around the world. We recall that sacred meal that Jesus shared with his disciples and called upon them to "do this in remembrance of me." We reflect on the depth of God's love seen in Jesus, God's willingness to become human to show us how to live – loving God, one another, and all creation. It is a continuation of that story from that second chapter of Genesis, the story of creation, cooperation, and connection. It's God's love story.

We are called to be active participants in that ongoing love story – connecting and cooperating with one another, caring for other human beings and all of creation, and loving the One who created and loves us. May it be so.