

“Storyline: In the Beginning”

Genesis 1

January 4, 2009

First Presbyterian Church of Kingwood

Dr. Jim Davis

I've got a confession to make. Yesterday morning, as I sat in my study at home and thought about what I would say to all of you at the beginning of this sermon I felt a little overwhelmed. For this morning you and I are about to begin a significant journey.

We're about to begin reading God's word together, from start to finish and when people do that God makes them a promise. The promise is made in the form of a little parable. In the middle of the Old Testament, speaking through a prophet called Isaiah, the same God whose word spoke the world into being, says this.

“For as the rain and the snow fall down from heaven, and return not again where they come from, but water the earth, bringing forth seed and giving growth ... so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth. It will not return to me empty, but it will accomplish what I desire and prosper in the purpose for which I send it.”

In other words, God has a purpose in mind for those who read His word. And that purpose is growth. His promise is that if we'll let Him rain His word into our lives it will cause us to grow. So on this first Sunday of 2009, I wonder ... are you ready to let it rain in your life?

And while you're thinking about it, let me tell you a story. It's a story I heard once, and it's worth hearing, but it starts off a little dry. In fact it starts off in the middle of a drought.

In the dust bowl years, in April of 1935, on a day known as “Black Sunday” a dust storm blew through a small Kansas town. The storm was so severe that witnesses reported they couldn't see their hands in front of their faces when they walked outside. Livestock lay down in the fields and were immediately covered with a layer of dust. Some got up afterwards, some didn't. The few crops left growing in the field after the storm were damaged and in danger.

So the next Sunday morning the pastor of the community church stood up in the pulpit and announced there would be a prayer meeting that evening at five o'clock in a farmer's field.

When the time for the prayer meeting came, the pastor wondered how he was going to pray for a community who had suffered so much. He wasn't certain he could help them hope again, in fact he wasn't certain he'd be able to pray at all. But as he walked up to the front of the small crowd that gathered that evening in a farmer's field, he noticed something. He noticed a small girl holding by her side a black umbrella!

So he began his prayer with the same words from Isaiah that I mentioned to you a moment ago. "Almighty God," he prayed, "as the rain and the snow fall down from heaven and return again, but water the earth ..."

So let me ask you again. I wonder; are you ready to let it rain in your life this year? You see I'm convinced, my friends, just like that pastor in Kansas was convinced by the faith of a little girl, amazing things can happen when we dare to believe in the power of God.

And God's power promises us this morning if we will let him rain His words into our lives this year we will grow. We will grow from people who find it hard to understand what God is doing into people who understand God's great desire.

For you see, God does indeed have a great desire for us and for the world. And that great desire is found in the opening chapter of Genesis. It's hiding in the words we read this morning. And the truth is it's hiding in plain sight because it's repeated seven times in Genesis chapter one. God's great desire for us is that we would discover and live into a reality God calls "good."

Six times in the space of twenty-five verses that word is repeated; "And God saw that it was good, and God saw that it was good, and God saw that it was good ...". It's like the chorus of a song, the part that you can remember even when you forget the rest of the words.

Six times the chorus is repeated and then just to make sure we don't miss it, at the end of the song it's repeated a seventh time with emphasis; "and indeed" verse 31 says, "it was very good." What's interesting to notice though is that it is no single part of creation by itself, but all of the parts working together that God calls "very good."

Dallas Willard is a Christian and a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California. And he notices that. So he says this. God's great desire is "the creation of a community, with God Himself as its primary sustainer and most glorious inhabitant." If you want a one sentence summary of the message of Genesis 1, I really don't think you can do much better than that.

But if a sentence is still too long, then boil it down to a phrase. We were created for community. We were created to enjoy community with God, with one another and with the world. And when that kind of community comes about in our lives, it is “indeed very good.”

Of course God’s desire for us to experience that kind of “goodness” isn’t found only at the finish of the chapter. It’s found at the start too. For the first few sentences suggest very strongly that the very reason God created was in order to share the “goodness” of community with a world of creatures.

“In the beginning,” Genesis says, *Elohim* (that’s a Hebrew word for God and its plural, communal) “In the beginning *Elohim* created the heavens and the earth. But story goes on. And the *Ruach Elohim* (the Spirit of God), was hovering over the darkness of the deep.

A few days ago Carolyn and I were sitting in our living room, visiting with Carolyn’s older brother Stephen and his wife Ann. Stephen and Ann had come from San Diego to Austin with their family to visit Ann’s parents in Austin and they’d driven from there to our house to see Kingwood for the first time.

Now before I tell you what we were talking about that afternoon in our living room, what you need to know is this. Stephen is a theoretical nuclear physicist with a doctoral degree. He’s published papers. He stays current in his field and he’s respected by his peers. So when he starts to talk science, I listen, or at least I try to! For sometimes Steve gets way beyond me.

The good news is that he doesn’t seem to mind circling back to try and explain things to me again. But this time he didn’t have to. For he started the conversation by saying that over the course of the past few years, his understanding of cosmology had been shifting. “It’s very different now than what we learned in grad school just twenty years ago” he said.

And then he said something that really caught my attention. “One of the things we’re learning,” he said is that much of the universe and perhaps most of it initially was made up of something called “dark matter” and “dark energy.”

When he mentioned that term dark energy I couldn’t help but think of what Genesis 1 says about the Spirit hovering over the darkness of the deep. So I asked him, “Steve, if you were a person with an ancient Hebrew vocabulary and you wanted to describe dark energy and dark matter, the stuff you say physicists now believe was used in the big bang to create the universe, do you think you might describe it by talking about a “darkness covering the face of the deep?”

Steve nodded. He'd guessed the question was coming. So I suppose he guessed the next one too. "And what do physicists believe was necessary to transform dark energy and dark matter into the kind of energy and matter that we call the universe?" I asked. I wasn't surprised when he answered "a force we really don't understand" he replied. But that force Genesis says was a personal power. It was the *Ruach Elohim*.

So in the first two verses of Genesis there is already a community of two; God and the Spirit, but we're not finished yet. For there's another. Verse 3 says that *Elohim* spoke. And when it says God spoke, the Hebrew word is *Dabar*. It's an interesting word because it can be used as either a verb or a noun. So it can mean to speak, but it can also mean the speaker or the word that's spoken.

"In the beginning," John says, "was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life and the life was the light of every being." In other words, John is telling us that when he reads Genesis, he's convinced that the word it describes, the word that speaks creation into existence is a being, a personal being, the second person of the trinity who became incarnate in Jesus Christ.

So let's go back and review for a minute. At the time of creation, Genesis seems to suggest that three personal beings were already alive; *Elohim*, *Ruach* and *Dabar*. They existed before creation. They existed together in community. And they existed in such close community that they worked with each other as co-creators.

And when they created, they didn't create only one light. They created two to work together, the sun to rule the day and the moon to rule the night. In other words, they were meant to work together.

And they didn't create only one kind of vegetation. They created two, plants yielding seed and fruit trees of every kind. In other words they were meant to work together.

And they didn't create only one human being. They created two, male and female, in their image. And they gave them authority to rule the earth, both of them working together.

And when they had finished creating the whole community of lights and plants and animals and humans that we call the universe, when they finished doing that and everything was in right relationship, working together it was "indeed very good."

And it still is. Last week Carolyn and I took some time off with our family to go to Port Aransas and last Tuesday morning we found ourselves walking on the beach. Our kids were out in front of us laughing. Carolyn was holding my hand. The sun was shining over the early morning surf and I looked at my wife and she looked back at me and we both knew it. God was present with us in that moment and it was indeed “very good.”

But it was only for a moment. For in the next moment someone stepped on a shell. They yelped and when they yelped Carolyn let go of my hand. The look on her face turned from contentment to concern and a little cloud temporarily covered the sun. It was there for a moment. God’s great desire for us was fulfilled and then it was gone. And there is a reason why that happens. We’ll talk about it next week.

But for this week, remember Genesis one was meant to teach us that God’s great desire to share “good” with us, the same kind of “good” that exists in the Trinity, a “good” that grows out of community and creates community; a right relationship with God, with the world and with each other.

Let’s pray ...