

PENTECOST 20

Proper 22 - Year B

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*Note: During the 2024 Season after Pentecost, **Sermons That Work** will use Track 2 readings for sermons and Bible studies. Please consult our archives for many additional Track 1 resources from prior years.*

Genesis 2:18-24

¹⁸Then 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 every 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.

notices the existential aloneness of what it is to be human. In this account of Creation, animals are brought into being as potential partners for humanity. Formed out of the same dirt, humankind and animals are deeply connected in a web of intricate relationship, yet it is only when another is created from the very same flesh that the person recognizes the potential of a true partner with whom to share fully in what it means to be human.

Discussion Questions

In what ways do you now, or might you eventually, experience yourself as intricately connected to the web of Creation – to the animals, the plants, the very earth on which you stand?

If you have a partner, how did you come to realize that they are flesh of your very flesh? In what ways are they able to satisfy how you experience aloneness? In what ways might you need to find that apart from your partner?

Commentary from Simon Dinglasan

In the first story of Creation from Genesis 1, humanity is created on the sixth day and cast as something of a pinnacle of God’s creative imagination. Such an account of the process of the Divine creative act lends itself to a particular theological perspective that locates the grace of God at the top of the hierarchy. By contrast, in this account of the Creation narrative, we see the singular human person formed out of the very dust of the ground. In a sense, humanity is “flesh of the flesh” of the earth, connected in a profound way with the stuff of all things. And in God’s loving care for the human, God

If you do not have a partner, where do you find your deepest connections to Divine grace? In animal companions? In friends, chosen family, or biological family?

Psalm 8

- ¹ O Lord our Governor, *
how exalted is your Name in all the world!
- ² Out of the mouths of infants and children *
your majesty is praised above the heavens.
- ³ You have set up a stronghold against your
adversaries, *
to quell the enemy and the avenger.
- ⁴ When I consider your heavens, the work of your
fingers, *
the moon and the stars you have set in their
courses,
- ⁵ What is man that you should be mindful of him? *
the son of man that you should seek him out?
- ⁶ You have made him but little lower than the angels;
*
you adorn him with glory and honor;
- ⁷ You give him mastery over the works of your hands;
*
you put all things under his feet:
- ⁸ All sheep and oxen, *
even the wild beasts of the field,
- ⁹ The birds of the air, the fish of the sea, *
and whatsoever walks in the paths of the sea.
- ¹⁰ O Lord our Governor, *
how exalted is your Name in all the world!

Commentary from Simon Dinglasan

Psalm 8 continues this theme of the place of humanity in Creation. Humankind is made of the same stuff as everything else on earth. So, we might be better served if we called ourselves earthlings, to underscore that primary relationship of humanity to the very ecosystem in which we exist. Yet the psalmist highlights that among all the beings on earth, humans have been given a special task of exercising mastery over Creation. One could use the lens of the Genesis 1 narrative to understand that task to mean having “dominion over.” But our lectionary asks us to use the lens of loving relationship to wrestle with the awesome responsibility of what it means to, essentially, get a master’s degree in God’s loving intent in the Creative act. The Garden of Eden waited for humankind to be created so someone could tend to its needs. Animals were created as potential partners for humanity. Extrapolating from these two ideas, humankind was brought into being therefore to cooperate with the Divine creative act by paying attention to the world around us and to discern how to attend to its wellbeing.

Discussion Questions

What do you notice is happening in the natural world around you right now? If you find that challenging, how might you nurture your awareness of nature’s rhythms?

Have you brought to prayer the effects of climate change? If so, how might God be calling you to respond given your circumstances? If not, what keeps you from engaging in prayerful dialogue with God about this issue?

Hebrews 1:1-14, 2:5-12

¹ Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³ He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say,

“You are my Son;
today I have begotten you”?

Or again,
“I will be his Father,
and he will be my Son”?

⁶ And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,

“Let all God's angels worship him.”

⁷ Of the angels he says,

“He makes his angels winds
and his servants flames of fire.”

⁸ But of the Son he says,

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,
and the scepter of righteousness is the scepter
of your kingdom.

⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated
lawlessness;
therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your
companions.”

¹⁰ And,

“In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands;

¹¹ they will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like clothing;

¹² like a cloak you will roll them up,
and like clothing they will be changed.

But you are the same,
and your years will never end.”

¹³ And to which of the angels has he ever said,

“Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies a footstool for your
feet”?

¹⁴ Are not all angels spirits in the divine service,
sent to serve for the sake of those who are to
inherit salvation?

⁵ Now God did not subject the coming world,
about which we are speaking, to angels. ⁶ But
someone has testified somewhere,

“What are humans that you are mindful of them
or mortals that you care for them?

⁷ You have made them for a little while
lower than the angels;

you have crowned them with glory and honor,
⁸ subjecting all things under their feet.”

Now in subjecting all things to them, God left
nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not
yet see everything in subjection to them, ⁹ but we
do see Jesus, who for a little while was made
lower than the angels, now crowned with glory
and honor because of the suffering of death, so
that by the grace of God he might taste death for
everyone.

¹⁰ It was fitting that God, for whom and through
whom all things exist, in bringing many children
to glory, should make the pioneer of their
salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹ For the
one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified
all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not
ashamed to call them brothers and
sisters, ¹² saying,

“I will proclaim your name to my brothers and
sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise
you.”

Commentary from Simon Dinglasan

Hebrews functions as a word of encouragement for a community that is beginning to lose heart and whose faith is wavering in the face of persecution from the larger community. The first part of this reading presents a “high Christology” that reinforces the idea of Jesus as the perfect earthly image of God’s divine will. By quoting Psalm 8, the author of Hebrews then casts Jesus as the perfect example for Christians to follow when doubts begin to overtake them. When faced with unearned suffering, we can turn for comfort to the one who was made perfect through suffering. The fully divine Christ, who is made fully human in Jesus, shares in our flesh, and so we know that God is present to us even in our earthly trials.

Discussion Questions

When have you found it difficult to hold onto your faith? Who was there to help you?

How might you embody today the promise that God walks with us? What is it like to be such a public witness to your faith?

Mark 10:2-16

²Some, testing him, asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” ³He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” ⁴They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” ⁵But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. ⁶But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ⁷‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, ⁸and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. ⁹Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

¹⁰Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, ¹²and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

¹³People were bringing children to him in order that he might touch them, and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Commentary from Simon Dinglasan

It has to be said that this is one of the difficult teachings of Jesus, and unfortunately has and continues to be used to keep people in abusive relationships. If we use the hermeneutical lens that flows from the Creation narrative in Genesis 1, then we might come to read this text from a place of domination and control, understood as an absolute denunciation of divorce. But our lectionary this year draws us to ponder more deeply the hermeneutical lens of relationship that we find in Genesis 2. The decision to wed and “become one flesh” comes with great responsibility, and especially if children are involved. The caution here is not to enter into a decision to divorce in a careless way, but to be mindful of the impact on others in the wider web of relationships that surrounds us. Even within a changed context, we continue to have responsibility to care for and to love them.

Discussion Questions

If you have been touched by divorce in some way, what were some unexpected impacts? Based on your experience, how might you counsel someone who is considering divorce?

How might divorce actually be an act of deep and loving care for one’s partner and for all the relationships in one’s life?

As an exercise in mindfulness, what are the limits you have placed on the significant relationships in your life? Were you intentional about those limits, or did they arise organically?