“Created in Love, To Love”

Genesis 2:4b-25

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To begin this narrative lectionary this year, we start, appropriately enough in the beginning.

In the Garden of Eden.

We start with creation.

Now, it’s interesting to note that this is the second of 2 creation stories.

In Genesis chapter 1, we find the more well-known version of creation.

That tale about 6 days of work creating the universe and resting on the 7th.

That version of the story is focused on the cosmos – the big picture!

It describes how God created every particle and element in the universe!

It is a magnificent tale.

But this other version of the creation story takes on a different focus.

This one a more intimate description of human creation.

Rather than talking about the creation of water and sky and land, Genesis 2 talks about the first humans .

This portion of the Biblical narrative has a more personal tone to it.

One of the gifts this version of creation offers is an understanding of our beginning.

It is important to know where we came from if we want to understand who we are and how we fit in to God’s story.

The theologian John Calvin opens his lengthy writings by saying that knowledge of God comes from knowledge of self.

So, it is doubly important to understand who we are and why we were created.

So we start with a dry, barren land in this tale.

We are told there wasn’t much there to begin with.

Nothing, actually.

Out of that nothing, God created everything, starting with earth and the heavens.

God sent rain to quench that dry earth, making the way for plants and abundant vegetation to spring forth.

Seeing the need for a caretaker for all of this land, God set about creating Adam, the first human being who would be the steward of the land.

He was called to till the ground and care for God’s creation.

Adam is created from the earth.

His name in Hebrew literally means “earth creature”.

He isn’t yet called a man and at this point, gender is irrelevant as there is only one of human creature.

So this lone being, this earth creature, is given the task of caring for God’s creation.

Things were starting out well, and God seemed pleased with Adam.

But, God realized Adam was not sufficient on his own.

There was something missing.

Adam was alone.

We often translate alone to mean lonely but that’s a rather contemporary translation of the text.

Adam didn’t know he was lonely, because he didn’t know what it was like to have companionship.

You can’t miss something you’ve never had.

What God means by alone is that Adam was unable to fulfill the tasks he was created for.

God had intended to create a being that was made in the image of God.

But Adam was an incomplete representation.

An isolated being does not make an accurate representation of a Trinitarian God.

That is, a God who’s very nature is act in relationship, not in isolation.

Because we are special creatures created in the image of God, we’re not meant to be isolated, solitary creatures.

We recognize how important this is anytime we hear about children being raised apart from the typical social setting.

There have been instances of children being dropped off in the wilderness and wind up be raised by wild animals.

The image of Mowgli in the “Jungle Book” comes to mind.

In other sad cases, some parents have locked their children in a room and prevented all social contact.

These so called feral children lack the common skills and capabilities that make us human.

Oftentimes their capacity for language and emotion and proper development of their mind are lacking.

They miss out on that key component of relationship. Socialization. Love.

We also see this affect when it comes to solitary confinement in prisons.

To be isolated from human contact is one of the worst forms of punishment.

We’re not designed to be able to withstand it.

If you’ve ever seen Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, you know this is true.

The psychologist posits that all humans have the same needs, which progress in a hierarchy.

At the bottom are basic physiological needs – food, water, sleep.

The basics we need for survival.

Next up is safety.

Everyone needs to have a sense of security and safekeeping from harm.

And then, next in the hierarchy of needs is love and belonging.

More important that achievements or status or self-esteem, all humans need to feel loved and we need to feel a sense of belonging in community.

It is vital for our survival.

So back in the garden, God saw that Adam was alone.

God saw that Adam was good, but the picture was incomplete.

This is like the moment when Bob Ross takes a look at his painting and decides to add a “happy little tree” to make the painting complete.

It was simply missing something.

So God decides to find a suitable partner for Adam.

Someone or something that will complete him and make him whole.

In the first attempt, God creates all of the animals of the earth.

Every single creature that lives on earth was created, formed and fashioned by God.

God invites Adam to name the creatures, hoping a suitable companion would surface.

But none of the animals sufficed for a partner.

Not even snuggly kittens or adorable koala bears.

And so God tries something different by putting Adam into a deep sleep and taking one of his ribs.

Out of that rib, God creates another earth creature, one that is different than Adam, but more similar than any of the animals on the earth.

It is significant that she was created out of Adam’s flesh and not out of a fresh batch of dirt like the rest of the animals.

It shows that man and woman are made of the same substance, two parts of the same image of God.

Adam was given the privilege of naming this new creature, and decided on “woman”.

Now, it’s interesting because the Hebrew text doesn’t actually call Adam “man” until woman is created.

Before he was just an earth creature, without gender.

But when woman comes along, Adam’s identity is shaped in a way that is more complete than it was before.

Suddenly we are shown the full image of God, made manifest in two parts.

We don’t see the completion of humanity until woman comes along.

This is because the image of God is fully revealed in both men *and* women.

Both of them are equally important to complete the image.

The text tells us that woman was created as a helper for Adam.

I believe the King James Version of the Bible translates it as helpmeet.

There is a common misconception that this term means woman is ranked lower than man.

That she was created to submit and serve and be ruled over by man.

The term “helper” certainly suggests this is the case.

But if we look elsewhere in the Bible, we see other instances of this word helper.

In Psalm 121, that same word is used to describe God.

It states that God is our helper.

Now, it would be an understatement to say that calling God our subordinate is a heretical phrase.

God is over and above all things, more supreme than any other being.

So when God is referred to as a helper, it is not saying that God is our servant or junior ranked colleague.

The Psalmist is not claiming that God is ranked lower than humans.

What it is saying is that God acts like a mirror set in front of us.

Placed opposite of us, helping us see more clearly what we are and who we are.

God acts as a helper by way of showing us a full image of ourselves.

This is the same role woman plays in Genesis chapter 2.

She is not a subordinate, someone who ranks lower than man does.

Rather, she is a complementary image of man.

Someone created to help the man fulfill his task and be complete.

She is placed opposite of man to show him who he is.

To help him more fully understand his identity.

This can only happen when a complementary being is brought into the fold.

Woman offers this complementary image, helping man become more fully himself.

So God takes a look at this duo and rejoices that humanity is now complete.

God had set about the task of making creatures in God’s own image.

It started with one, man, and the task was completed in the two, man and woman.

Now that this image is complete, they can go about the work that God calls them to do.

Man and woman are created to act in relationship, just as God does.

If we go back to the part in the passage that talks about it not being good for man to be alone.

We realize that relationships, living with each other is a crucial element of our identity.

It’s a big part of what God calls us to do.

We are reminded of this in the scripture text we read this morning.

We are reminded that God created us in love, to love.

Our very nature, the reason we were created, was to be in relationship with each other.

Doing so reflects the authentic nature of God.

A God who acts out of love, and desires to be in relationship.

When we start to ask those big questions:

What is my purpose?

Why was I created?

We can look back at this lesson in Genesis.

We can go back to the beginning to discover where we came from.

Doing so will help us realize that we are special creatures, designed by God, created to be in relationship with God and with one another.

When we get to wondering what this life is all about, we can trust that love is at the root of our creation.

That we are doing things right when we accept the call to life in community and relationship, even when it is messy and difficult.

And we can trust that God is right there, in the center of it all. Amen.