

In the beginning, a long time ago // Amazed at how far out ... and how far in ... the small vs the very large! // Where did this all come from?

[Scripture/science ... conversation is open ... email questions --- and I'll answer them or find answers ... include in sermon? Or have a group discussion - [genesis@livinghopeonline.ca](mailto:genesis@livinghopeonline.ca)]

At stake in how we understand "in the beginning" is our connection to God, and our connection to each other. And our connection to the earth. What connection or relationship is there?

One group of people wrote the following: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness. ...."

Are they though? I borrow from our neighbours to the south, because their founding document is helpful to understand what people believe in general in this day and age. Is it self-evident that everyone is equal? Especially when we are born with more or less skill, more or less strength, more or less intellect? More or less family wealth? And so on...Is equality really self evident?

The stars are wonderful ... but looking out at the galaxies, do they tell us about WHO God is? How much he loves us? Or, how to connect to him? Do the stars tell us about other people, how valuable or invaluable they are? Do the stars speak to us about how to treat other people - how to connect to them? What about the earth - do the stars speak to us about how to treat the earth? Should we use extractive economic policies - take, convert to wealth, and use that wealth for our benefit? Should we care about the long term viability of earth as a planet humans can live on? ... ask those questions of the stars, and the stars don't answer you.

From the cosmos, you cannot deduce how we are connected to creation, to each other, and to God ... you can't extrapolate an evidence based result. You need something to break in to show us those connections. You need REVELATION .... And the only way to receive that revelation is faith. Revelation comes to us, faith is our response to it. It is our reality.

Scripture, is the primary revelation to us that illuminates the connection between God and us, the connection between us and creation, and the connections between one another.

So, how do we read scripture well? The first thing we do, is we need to take the text very seriously for what it is. The greatest respect for this text begins by holding the text in the highest regard. Genre is the first decision we make when reading a text. It is important to take care about making that decision because it has significant influence on how we read. Genre is NOT a sneaking way of making some texts apply and some texts not. Genre is the first step in taking a text LITERALLY ---

Genre is a classification - what kind of literature are we reading? Genres like poetry, historical, biography, myth, genealogy, fictional story, letters. Each genre will determine how we read and process the information we are reading!

We make a genre decision - often automatically, without consciously thinking about it. For example, when we are reading the book of Chronicles – [read text] - do we go out looking for the king, Joash, and try to protect him? OF course not. He died a long time ago, these commands are not written to us. We are interpreting the genre as historical narrative, and reading within that genre in order to make sense of the text.

The genre decision for Genesis 1 is important - biography? Science text book? Fictional story? No, no and no. If Genesis is not a science book, does that mean the text is wrong? Not at all! The text is written with what we call, poetic license – and that poetic licenses explains the relationships between the created elements, and between God and those elements.

The text in Genesis is focused on **connections and relationships**. For example, the Genesis account of creation is very aware that there are other accounts of creation with many gods in them. Here, we have one God, and the other elements that could be Gods? Like the sun, moon, water, sky, stars, sea monsters – whatever, they are all just created. They are not gods. The relationship is the important message the text is communicating, and the language used depends on poetic license through symbol and rhythm.

The 7 days are both symbolic and also expressing deeper meaning about creation. They are trying to tell us that God created the cosmos in the fullness of time he created it. 7 is the mark of completion. When it was good and ready and complete, that means we've reached day 7. This is poetic license - using symbols, and metaphors, and doing so in order to speak to us about the relationship of creation to creator.

Also, the rhythm of creation is given in with 7 beats to it. This is the song of creation, and it goes 1,2,3,4,5,6 SEVEN! Days 1, 2, 3 is the creation of the spaces to be inhabited, days 4, 5, 6 are the population of those spaces. And 7 stands alone as the climactic finale with everyone on stage. Like a musical --- day 7 is the final act!!!

Creation has a rhythm and a balance to it. There is a poetry and a rhythm to the words - they don't fall with a staccato and then this happened and then this happened and then this happened ... they flow and turn and are phrased; and framed with "And God saw it was good ... it was evening, it was morning ... " Given what God reveals elsewhere in the bible to support and reinforce this 7 fold rhythm to creation, it isn't just symbolic – but it is in fact woven into the very creation itself. Hence the sabbath rhythm to human life, and the Jubilee rhythm of human economic practices, etc.

But is it ok for us to read this with poetic license? Yah for sure! We read words right from Jesus' mouth with poetic license. Hate your mother and father. Hate your Wife, and child. Really? Should we do that??? Is that what Jesus is asking us to do? Literally? How about - Pluck out your eye if it sins. I think we should see a lot more people who have taken out both of their eyes .... We can tell that Jesus is using hyperbole there. We don't take him literally, we can handle that he uses expressions of speech.

Can we only learn from facts? Jesus had no problem telling stories he made up, that were not based upon facts. He began his story, Once upon a time, there was a man who had two sons.

Genesis 1 isn't fiction in that sense ... its more like a painting. [image ...]

Is this painting a lie? The sky at nighttime doesn't really do that .... Things don't really look this way, yet we can tell what's going on in it --- sleepy town, turmoil above at night. But more - WE know this feeling this painting is communicating ... if we're willing to look at it carefully --- have you looked out at night, when it felt like your mind was swirling and the light was hard to focus and the air swirled and spun around you. Vincent drew this as an apocalyptic composition that reflects his inner struggle to survive. To survive living. Just living is hard. // Sometimes, while living, when we really look at ourselves, the night feels like this. He drew what it feels like ... not what a camera sees. Did he lie? Or did he tell the truth? That was certainly his night. His feelings. He told truth in his art.

Can we see Genesis as an art work? Telling the truth through impressions, and colours, and feeling, and relationships?

Here's a poetic move the inspired author made - The sun and the moon were not named, even though Hebrew has words at hand to name them. So why were the sun and moon not named? But referred to with their size of lighting? That's because the author doesn't want you to think of them as other gods, as sub or secondary gods that have been tamed, but as items of creation with a function to perform. No more. That's because the genesis creation story is contradicting other stories. It is revelation that comes to us and reveals the relationships and connections we could not otherwise see through even the best detective work.

That's why it is so radical when we see Jesus doing and saying only what God can say and do. Who is this man?? How can he walk on water and calm the storm?? Do the wind and the waves know his name!?!

This comes to us as REVELATION --- not deduction. Cannot get to the answers that lie "In the Beginning" by deduction. We depend on revelation that is presented to us in story. And this revelation brings Contradiction and correction to what we know. Revealing what none of us could deduce.

Oh yes, the Heavens and earth to speak to a god existing, and many people have figured out there must be a god involved in all of this ... but, what are the characteristics of that creator, or the story of who that god is are quite different than this story.

Other creation stories [ANE] have great conflict between the gods. And maybe creation comes out of the death of one of them, or creation comes out of the conflict itself. That means outcomes could have been otherwise! In the Bible, God creates with his word. Speaks, and it is. There is no conflict for God to overcome. There is no conflict for God. He expresses his will, and it is as he wills. And the creation made, is not part of God, God is outside of the creation. He is wholly other. And he is One, there is no one or no thing like him - one God. Everything else is created. Creation is not divine, even though God is intimately involved.

What about how people think about God and creation now? Why is this all here? General understanding goes something like this: God created the world, he'd like you to be a good person. The goal of life is to be the best you possible. God basically doesn't really get involved in stuff, you can ask him for help if you're in serious trouble ... If you're basically a good person, he'll ship off to heaven at the end ... The connection just isn't there! It isn't much of a connection.

In modern understanding either, God created the world and basically isn't really engaged now, or no God started this. Either way - life is what you make of it. Craft a life you like. This here might be all you get, so make it worth it. The connection to each other is based on "what can you do for me" – "do you make me feel good? Do you help me get ahead?" Then we have connection - if not, then we do not. Connection to each other is pragmatic and self-serving. And if God exists, the connection to God is also, pragmatic - if I need him, I'll call.

But the bible tells a different story. God created the world in order to bless creation. He begins by blessing each day, each segment of creation and calling it good. Blessing is the unifying theme of the whole book!!! He blesses the creation, blesses the creatures! After creating the sea monsters and creatures that move in the water and creatures that fly in the air - vs. 22 - Be Fruitful and Multiply! God blesses the fishes and the little birds and the big fishes and the big birds --- be fruitful!!! Multiply!! Fill the waters and fill the skies ....

God blesses. The creatures don't feed the gods, God feeds and blesses the creatures. Perhaps most importantly different from other narrations of how things were created, in this story, God does not create because he needs something. In other stories, the gods are hungry, so humans are made to get them food. Or to labour for them for some reason or another. The gods have needs, and the humans are made to serve.

Not so in the bible. Here, God creates everyone to receive from God, not to give to God. Life is different if you live knowing that. You don't need to grasp and claw - if God is giving to you freely.

That dramatically changes our connection to God. God is present, and God is for us. And this connection of blessing from God to us, changes how we read the rest of the bible as well.

What about humans in all of this? Day 6. Is this the big day? Creation of the land creatures, and among them - humans!! Humans are one of the land creatures. **DISTINCTION AND COMMANALITY** ... created on the same day as other land creatures. Don't get their own special day. Yet, different -

//image of God and the difference in the blessing ...

// image of the god - What does this image bearing, made in the image of God, mean? Text doesn't seem to want to say ... is it some characteristic or quality like our rationality or beliefs? Is it something we're supposed to do? Is it because we can have a relationship with God? [ink spilled]

Qualities? In order to communicate, they must be similar enough to do so.

Functions? After you create the temple for the God you worship, you then create the statue of the God to represent the God in the temple. The image of the God.

Also, the king can be the Image of the God would be the representative of that God to the people. And the king is given the tasks to rule and subdue and have dominion over the people and the kingdom. HERE ... and this is incredible – the image bearing language is for all people. All people are given the KINGLY tasks of ruling and subduing. That's pretty stunning! We're all meant to be kings of creation! SO, what is in the job description?

Rule and subdue language RADAH, to rule and KABASH, trample or subdue. These are very Hard edged verbs. Battle conquest. Enslave. Sexually assault, trample underfoot. These are the king's tasks. Also - A King is tasked with justice oversight, orphan and widow care - this are part of what it means to rule and subdue.

Oh but wait. Are we all kings? .. the image bearer language could mislead us to think we're all kingly – that's close. The reality is our image-bearing vocation or function is one of stewardship. Our ruling kingship qualities are derivative, dependent. We aren't in fact, king – but someone else is and we rule under their authority. Only God is the true king of the cosmos - we do not have unfettered rule and dominion ... this is someone else's garden.

To rule and subdue as the stewards of the King – there is a Strong component of caring for, looking after, - we are subject to God's moral and ethical will and rule. Did you look after the garden well?

Now, though these words are part of the larger context of kingship as a whole – widow care and all, it is strong language. Ruling and subduing in a forceful way will be required by human beings. There is no ROMANTIC view of creation in this chapter.

In our world, sometimes we can become sentimental about “Nature.” But nature is not a benevolent deity, it does not have your best interests at heart. It does not care about you. When people talk about being out in Nature as their “church” – they have profoundly misunderstood what church is, and what nature is, and their connection to nature. Certainly we can all have experiences of wonder in nature, that’s not a church. Church is the learning and teaching community centred on Jesus – yessss, that means you have to come in contact with other people and sometimes those people don’t do what you want them to, or they act in ways you disapprove of – well, that’s because church is a gathering of sinners! Nature can’t replace our church, we’re just trying to avoid actual church.

If God calls the world – GOOD why does it need ruling and subduing? Most of us have a view of Eden given to us either when we were raised in the church, or when we were introduced when we’re older --- We have this Vision of Eden as like a vacation at the spa. The trees lower their branches to you, as you reach out to them, so you can get the fruit from the hot tub.

We need to get out of our imagination notions of the beginning world as a spa or rest home. We need new imagery: Eden not as a spa, but as a gym! There is good work to do!! And that work is tied up in our relationship with God as Image bearers, and in our relationship with the earth as image bearers. And, MOST IMPORTANT: both this rule and subdue language, and image bearing, is part of fulfilling God's purpose of blessing all creation. We as image bearers are participating in the work of blessing all creation. We rule and subdue as part God's vision, and his work of blessing.

Together. All of us. Not just the kings. Not just the men. Not just the powerful, the famous, or the rich. Not just the white. We all get to be image bearers, representing God to creation. And this is true regardless of social class, regardless of capability or intellect. Each one of us has been placed upon this earth as a representative of the divine, a steward, a dignitary of the God.

How should you treat a foreign dignitary? If you abuse and misuse or ignore or mistreat the dignitary – it is as if you mistreated the king. If you treat that dignitary well – it is as if you treated the king well.

Jesus says – what you do unto the least of these – what you do unto those who are least in the world – it is as if you do it unto me, for they are image bearers, they are my stewards, they are my ambassadors.

Image bearing changes our connection to people: In every person we meet, every neighbour, we have a connection with them as fellow bearers of God’s image to the cosmos. They are ambassadors of the divine to us, just as we are to them. Now, do you see how the 10 commandments make sense? They fulfill image bearer to image bearer relationships.

And, image bearing informs our connection to Nature: This is not our garden. It belongs to the King of Kings. Therefore, we cannot use extractive, exploitative, earth deforming practices on this world. Land, and animal husbandry cannot be for our pleasure alone --- this is not our garden. This belongs to the king who has entrusted us to shepherd it well. Acquisition is an insufficient guiding principle for how we treat resources.

This is not a spa made for our enjoyment, it is a gym, and we have a mission. We are stewarding and caring for someone else's garden that you can enjoy! [illustration ... borrowing someone's car/house/boat ... did you enjoy it? ... you should have. Did you care for it well?]

And Image bearing changes our Connection to God: First of all – we can have one! And an intimate one with a God who is for us and longs to see us flourish in the role he has crafted us for. And, we can receive everything as gift from him.

Day 7 - the climax, the pinnacle of creation isn't the human beings --- it's the sabbath. God's creation is so abundant you can take a day off!!

Blessing normally reserved for inanimate objects --- blessing of a day. Blessing of fruitfulness and multiplying .... This day has its own capacity for creativity!!! Capacities independent of work as we know it. The day or rest becomes the pinnacle of creation, rather than the making of humans ...

Instead of the rhythm of creation being on the phases of the moon, for example ... life as we know it runs on a 7 day rhythm. Whole day value ... could it be?? That keeping sabbath, makes it really easy for us to keep in connection with God? Could it be? That keeping sabbath makes it much easier for us to treat other human beings as image bearers? And to fulfill our vocation as image bearers?

--- connection/relationship //// THIS STORY :: We know something that others need to know .... We need to share this with them ....