

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
 Sermon: "God entrusts humanity with God's creation."
 Scripture: Genesis 1:1-2:3 & John 1:1-5?
 Rev. Steve Filyk
 August 31, 2025
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Claude Monet painted around 250 versions of Water Lilies
 inspired by the pond in his garden at Giverny, France.

The paintings are celebrated for their dreamy colors,
 reflections, and impressionistic brushwork.

At the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris,
 There is an immense version
 comprised of eight panels stretching over 300 feet in length.

The painting is housed in two adjoining oval rooms,
 Each with curving walls allowing the panels to wrap around you.
 Monet designed this immersive experience himself,
 calling it his "water landscape in which the viewer can lose themselves."

Visitors often describe the rooms as meditative, quiet, and almost spiritual.
 With no horizon or frame of reference, you feel suspended in water and light.

I can only imagine that Monet took pride in such a grand creation.

PAUSE

So what would it take for him to have invited one of his children,
 Neither who grew up to become artists,
 To pick up some paintbrushes and make their own addition
 Adding a panel or two to this work?
 What would it take you

To allow your children or grandchildren
 To participate with you,
 not in just one of your everyday creations,
 Say like making a batch of cookies,
 But one of your masterpieces:
 Pinstriping the hood on your classic automobile,
 Designing the center panel for an intricate quilt,
 Configuring the layout of your new living room,
 Adjusting the stocks and bonds
 in your superbly-balanced portfolio?

My guess is that most of us,
 Wouldn't invite anyone less-skilled than ourselves,
 To take part in our creations
 and leave their own mark.

So how about God?

Today's Bible lesson,
 the one that we read together as a congregation,
 Comes from the first chapter of the first book of the Bible.
 This lesson describes the creation of the world.

Most ancient cultures have their own creation stories.
 When we encounter them it helps us see that such stories
 (including those found in Holy Scripture) aren't simply concerned
 With the physical origins of the universe,
 but are attempts to explain how everything fits together.
 (see the definition of cosmogony in Cultural Background Study Bible p 3)

In the Ojibwe story of Turtle Island,
 the world is remade when a muskrat gives its life to bring soil to the surface.
 And the world begins anew on a turtle's back.
 The story reminds us that life involves gift, sacrifice, and interconnectedness.
 (see Turtle Island. (2018). Retrieved September 5, 2025, from Thecanadianencyclopedia.ca website:
<https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/turtle-island#:~:text=In%20other%20versions%2C%20the%20animals,the%20origins%20of%20the%20land.>)

Today we read a creation story from the Bible.

And it isn't the only one that is found there.
 You will find descriptions elsewhere both in the next chapter of Genesis,
 In the Book of Job, in the Psalms, and in the Gospel of John
 (Genesis 2, Job 38-41, Psalm 104, John 1:1-5).

The fact that there is more than one creation story in the Bible,
 Raises the question about what specific lesson
 the original writers were trying to address in their unique story,
 even as they were carried along by God's Spirit?

Maybe another way of saying it is,
 "what is unique or special about this creation account?"
 ("Commentary on Genesis 1:1—2:4a - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary," 2025)

Scholars believe that today's account
 Comes to us from the people of Israel
 While they were captive in Babylon.
 This seems to be corroborated by the fact
 it was the ancient Babylonians who first
 Observed a seven-day week.
 [each day corresponding to one of the seven celestial bodies
 that were visible to the naked eye]

(see Heineman, K. (2024, January 25). Why are there 7 days in a week? Thank the Babylonians | Astronomy.com. Retrieved September 6, 2025, from Astronomy Magazine website: <https://www.astronomy.com/science/why-are-there-7-days-in-a-week-thank-the-babylonians/>)

This creation story depicts a God who is wise and sovereign.
 "To the despairing exiles, it [makes a very pastoral declaration]
 that the God of Israel is the Lord of all of life."
 (Walter Brueggemann Genesis 24-25)

Just consider how creation unfolds.
 It happens by divine decree.
 God declares "Let there be light".
 And what happens? Instantly there is light.

Think of the last time you started a fire.
 You took some time piling up kindling and struck a match.
 But while a flame appear it only lasted a few seconds.

You needed to grab some paper and restack that kindling,
 And it was only the second time where you were more deliberate
 That you were able to get things going.

Not with God. A word is proclaimed
 And the new creation springs forth.

Of course, there is a process and sequence
 To the more fulsome arrangement of all creation.
 This is where God's wisdom is observed.

"God brings about "realms" on days one (light and darkness in Day and Night),
 two (Sky and waters below),
 and three (Earth as distinct from Seas)
 that are sequentially populated on days four
 (by "lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night"),
 five (birds and sea creatures),
 and six (land animals, including humans).

Day seven is set apart as the culmination when God rests."
 ("Commentary on Genesis 1:1—2:4a - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary," 2025)

One of our Bible Study participants noted
 The intelligence behind this ordering by asking
 "What would have happened if humanity
 Had been created on day one instead of day six?"
 Today's creation story declares the wisdom and sovereignty of God.
 You might have noticed this before.
 Genesis 1 offers a stark contrast to our modern scientific accounting
 Which is based on accidental happenings without any overarching plan.

Again, this declaration of the wisdom and sovereignty of God
 Would offer solace to a people
 trying to understand how to understand life
 after being displaced from their homeland.
 But to see this story solely as pastoral comfort for one people
 Requires overlooking important aspects
 That have implications for all nations.

What I find most incredible in this account, this story,
Is the role that is given to humanity.
You'll note that human being are created on the same day
As the wild and domestic animals.
This asserts our commonality with these creatures.

At the same time humanity has a unique place in creation.
We are told that man and woman are created in God's image.
We are told that God speaks to them.
And we are told that God gives them a special mandate:

"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.
Rule [have dominion] over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky
and over every living creature that moves on the ground."
(Genesis 1:28 NIV)

[There has been lots of discussion about that word 'dominion' or 'rule'.
As one write notes: "The inescapable fact about the biblical term "dominion,"
from the Hebrew verb radah,
is that it grants humans the right and responsibility to rule,
to govern the rest of creation.
It establishes a hierarchy of power and authority
in which the human race is positioned above the rest of the natural world.
Such a conclusion is clear from the use of radah
elsewhere in the Old Testament,
where it is employed for the rule of the head of the house
over household servants...
and of Solomon's officers over his conscripted labor force...

[But the writer continues]
The verb radah does not itself define how this dominion is to be exercised,
whether benevolently or malevolently.

(<https://directionjournal.org/25/2/rethinking-dominion-theology.html#:~:text=1:28%20are%20usually%20discussed,1%20Kings%205:30%5D>.)

If this dominion is exercised according to the example of Jesus Christ
Who shows us God's intention for humanity,

Then dominion can be understood as a servant type of leadership.
We are called to shepherd what God has created.
We are called to help the created order thrive.]

The unique place/role of humanity
Does more than tell us about ourselves and our responsibilities.
It tells us something important about God.

This God is not just sovereign and wise
But is also generous and trusting.
God designed the world so that it remains incomplete without us.
It requires humanity as cocreators and stewards
To bring it to fullness
And ensure its ongoing vitality.

Which takes us back to the beginning.
It is inconceivable that Monet would allow
His children to participate with him in the final panels
of that eight-panel epic Water Lilies.

And today we encounter a God
Who invites creation to join with him
As active participants in his ongoing work of creation.
Our God is not an aloof autocrat
but a relational being who is generous and trusting,
Who makes space for others to participate in all that God is doing.

Monet never have invited his children to touch his masterpiece.
Yet this God does.
God trusts you and me with His masterpiece, this world.
I don't know about you, but this makes me a lot more interested
In knowing this God. Amen.