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Creation Sunday

Chilson Hills Church
Howell, MI

“Big World”

Genesis 1:1 – 2:4

<http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=179821250>

The Vienna Sausage Company in Chicago, IL is situated in a building that was constructed in 1970. At one time they were located on the South Side of town before moving to what was, at the time, a state-of-the-art facility with advanced refrigeration systems and machinery.

But when they arrived at the new place, and cooked the first batch of old world style, hickory-smoked, natural cased hot dogs – they weren't as good. They tasted okay, but they something wasn't right. They didn't snap like they usually did and their color was off, they were pink and not red, like they were before.

So, they tried to figure out what was wrong; the ingredients were all the same, the process was all the same, they checked the temperature and investigated the water. They wracked their brains for a year and a half.

But then, one night, a group of old timers were reminiscing about the good ol' days when they remembered a guy named Irving. Irving was the kind of guy who knew everyone and had nicknames for everyone.

Irving's job was to weave his through the processing plant with the uncooked sausages, winding his way through the boiling room, the hanging bins, by the corned beef tanks, up the elevator and finally to the smoke room where they would smoke the Vienna sausages.

And as they continued to reminisce about Irving the guys began thinking to themselves – in the new plant, there is no Irving, so there is no journey through boiling rooms and hanging bins. In the new plant the sausages are cooked and put in a cold room next door. It was Irving's trip that made the hot dogs red.

And so today, if you go to the Vienna Sausage Company in Chicago, IL there is a room that seeks to emulate Irving's trip. It simulates the passage ways and the steps that Irving took.

Figuring out the recipe something wonderful and trying to learn how it has been created is maddening and frustrating. Whether its Vienna sausages or the universe itself, there will always be discussions about how it was made or what went into it.

With the Vienna sausages, people suggested temperature, ingredients and the water salinity.

With Creation people usually align themselves with two camps – does The Bible (specifically Genesis) have it right or does science have it right.

There are some preachers in this world who would tell you that this passage of Scripture is the authoritative account of how you and the pet you hold was created.

They would also say that the only way to read this is in a way that affirms that the world was created in six 24-hour days and

that the entire world is about 5-6,000 years old.

I am not one of those preachers.

There are other preachers who would say that this passage isn't exactly a play-by-play of the beginning of the world but an ancient attempt to explain the complexity of the world without the lens of modern science. It's a sweet little story, a myth, a primitive account of the way the universe came to be. The writer of Genesis was doing his very best, but "Bless His Heart," he just didn't know very much about how science or the world works.

I am not one of those preachers

There are some preachers who say this passage doesn't mean literal 6 days but long periods of time, "ages" or "eras" where creation evolved slowly.

Again, I am not one of those preachers.

And then there are other preachers who believe this is a long poem that we and our pets can find ourselves in. It's a long and lyrical song that beautifully conveys the heart and mystery of Creation which includes humans and animals.

That... is not me either.

What I do believe is that this chapter of Scripture should be read literally. When I say literally, I mean that it should be read as the original authors wanted it to be read.

The original authors lived in an ancient time before the age of modern science. Now, when I refer to "modern science" I'm not referring to the technology of modern science (like telescopes, microscopes and computers), I am referring to the mental discipline that was based on deductive reasoning. Things were broken apart and dissected to find out what things were made of. And by doing this, people could better understand the world in which we live.

When we are struck with an illness, we want to know why – and a doctor, using modern science tells us why. When our car won't work, a mechanic – using deductive reasoning – tells us why. When the sky darkens and rain falls to the ground – meteorologists tells us why it happens. We find comfort by breaking things down. We care more about material, the substance, the things we can touch, smell, see, hear and taste and how they are able to exist.

The Ancients, didn't think this way. They cared about material and the substance, but they were far more concerned about function – about the role that something played and the purpose that a particular object had?

So, when someone fell ill, they asked themselves what the person had done to receive such an illness because illness was usually attributed to punishment or discipline, not whether or not you washed your hands.

The author of Genesis was from an Ancient culture that were much more interested in function and purpose; so, when I say that we

should read this text literally, I say that we should - to the best of our ability - read it as the ancients would read it.

We should read this not as a play-by-play account of how the world was created. Why? Because the ancients didn't read it this way and the text was originally written by them for them.

This is not to say that those who wrote Genesis didn't believe that God created the material things of the world. It just means that material was something they weren't very concerned about.

I believe this is a passage that goes beyond material creation and instead tells us how God gave purpose to this world; literally, how God gave life to this world.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” And then it says that the earth was “formless” and that darkness covered the face of the deep.

Another way of saying it, the world had no function, no purpose.

Downstairs, in the lower level of this church, we have, count them, Four upright pianos. I don't know how we got four upright pianos, but we do. Two of the pianos are salvageable – they can still play and can be worked and repaired. But the other two are practically useless. In fact one of them cannot be played at all. And the brand is such that its not worth repairing and to try restoring it would cost thousands.

Now, is there anything more useless than old upright piano? What do you do with a piano that can't play? Well, I went online this week and found a company that specializes in repurposing pianos. It makes them into large writing desks, stands for flat screen televisions and shelf units. They are using the disordered material and giving it new life.

When it says that the world was formless and void, what it means is that it was about as useless as a broken upright piano. It had no purpose and no function; it did not function as an ordered system.

And when, on the first day God created light and separated it from the darkness, inventing day and night along the way. What it means is that God gave an assignment to the day and night. But what God really did, was create a basis for time.

And on Day 2, God designated some water to be in the skies and the rest to be on the earth, what it means is that he assigned some water to come from the sky and some to be here on the earth – each serving a different purpose. God had just created a basis for weather.

On Day 3, God gathered the waters together and pulled back the curtain on dry land. God created trees and plants. But, this isn't about material things, what the ancients saw was that God created a basis for food.

On days 1-3, God created functions for this world, purposes. Now on days 4-6, God

created the things that will help the fulfill the functions.

So, on the fourth day, God created the sun and the moon, giving them the task of controlling time and ruling the night and day.

On the fifth day, God introduced the living creatures of the sky and sea.

On Day 6 it says that life sprang from the land in the form of wild and domesticated animals.

And then God made the pinnacle of all Creation: humans. God made these humans in God's image. And it says that they were given "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."¹

And then God called the humans to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it;"² And God gives humans the animals of the earth and plants for food.

Now it seems here as if the passage encourages people to dominate and use Creation for their own pleasure – not a very "earth-friendly" concept.

And it's true, this passage has been used by many to justify the domination of nature.

And, quite honestly, we have benefited from this.

I know that each time I enjoy a marinated breast of chicken, scrambled eggs, sweet corn, or raisins on my oatmeal, I am benefiting from our dominion over Creation. I know that each time I tug on a leash, visit a zoo, swat a fly, I am enjoying the benefits of being the lord of Creation.

But please note that Genesis 1 isn't telling us that we are the dictators and tyrants over Creation; what Genesis 1 is telling us is that we are given a godlike role in Creation, we are to be God's representatives in Creation.

And this is unusual because in other Near Eastern countries it was the other way around, creation was designed to serve the gods, but in Genesis, creation was established for the benefit of humanity. And also unlike other Near Eastern cultures where humans were created to supply the needs of the gods, but in Genesis 1, people were supposed to represent God to all of Creation.

Let me say that again, people, as it is presented in Genesis, are created in the image of God, and their role, their function, their purpose is to represent God to all of Creation...ALL of Creation.

It was about six years ago that Heather called me at the church office to tell me that a small stray cat had been invited into our house. I am slightly allergic to cats, so I wasn't too thrilled about this, but Heather persuaded me to let the cat come into the

¹ Genesis 1:26b

² Gen. 1:28

house during the day and then send it out at night.

We did this for a while and then the cat didn't show up. Once again, I got a call at the office, and Heather was in tears – she had been calling around the pet shelters and the little cat had been picked up and placed in a kennel at the animal shelter. We talked about it, and to make a long story short, Heather went in and adopted that cat.

We call her Mottle, after the tailor in “Fiddler On The Roof.” And she's been with us for six years and two moves. She's a pretty cool cat.

In churches, we talk a lot about caring for our brother or sister and rightfully so. But before we were to care for other humans, God had called us to care for the creatures of the world by acting responsibly in nature, and being a good steward of our natural resources. We are given godlike roles in our world as caregivers who have the ability and the intelligence to accomplish such a goal.

I've heard it said before that dogs look at people this way, “You feed me, you love me, you clean up after me – you must be God.” But the cat says, “You feed me, you love me, you clean up after me – I must be God.

That may be true, but according to Scripture, the dogs have it right. Humans have been created and ordained to be godlike in their role amongst nature. They are supposed to care for nature as God cares for us.

And when humans accept their role as caregivers of Creation, when created things function as they should fulfilling the purpose given to them, then God has a word for it, “good.”

It's a refrain that's used over and over and over again in the passage. “God saw that it was good.” It's the phrase that is said at the end of each day. “God saw what he had made and indeed it was very good.” In other words, “All things were working properly.”

The creation story as we read it in Genesis was not meant to be a precise historical record of what took place when the universe was born. Instead, instead it is a message to every human that would walk the face of the earth: God has made everything and everything has a divinely ordained purpose, role and function. There are spare parts or pieces meant for garbage heap.

God has made everything and everything has a purpose, role and function – including us as humans. Creation Sunday is a reminder to all of us as we sit with our hamsters, dogs, cats, birds and turtles that we are meant to be caretakers and companions of this world, this earth that God has made.