

# Creation: Nothingness and God

Sermon Preached at Foundry United Methodist Church

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Genesis 1:1-19

John 1:1-5

Fifteen billion years ago, a quantum fluctuation in the vacuum before time set off an explosion. The explosion formed a clump of stuff that was so dense that it weighed a billion, billion, billion, billion, billion, billion pounds per square inch. (That's a one with 72 zero's behind it.) This clump of stuff was so hot that it burned at more than 100 million degrees.

Fifteen billion years ago, this clump of stuff began to expand. As it expanded, it got less and less dense. It began to cool and break into pieces. Over the next ten billion years this clump of stuff formed 125 billion galaxies.

About five billion years ago - about a third of time since the beginning of time - some stray pieces of matter, of stuff, of rock, in one of the 125 billion galaxies, was drawn together and formed a planet.

It was a nasty planet - all rock pitted by volcanos that were pouring forth lava and noxious gases and poisonous fumes. It was a nasty planet.

But, inside the lava, the stone that was pouring up out of the inside of this planet, there was water. The lava released the water into what little noxious atmosphere there was and when it cooled enough the water began to pour from the sky as rain.

For millions and millions of years it just rained on this planet. It was toxic rain. It was acid rain. The rain began to form into oceans. Because it was so acidic, it began to erode the rock and the rock slowly began to turn into soil.

Then, about three billion years ago, give or take, there was one cell of chemicals which somehow came together in a certain way so that the cell of chemicals was able to reproduce itself. Life was born on this little clump of rock in one of 125 billion galaxies.

The life multiplied and formed something like a simple algae which gave off oxygen into the atmosphere so that the atmosphere became more and more rich in oxygen. This allowed other forms of life to evolve in the ocean.

Then, sometime, maybe 400 million years ago, that life spread out of the ocean onto the dry land and became vegetation. Then, maybe 350 million years ago, animal life appeared on earth. Just two million years ago, animals began to stand up. And 400 thousand years ago, walking animals, called homo sapiens, were born.

We figured out somehow how to talk. We started praying to rocks and to trees and to the sun and to the moon.

Just 200,000 years ago, we learned how to make tools out of rocks.

And just 12,000 years ago, we figured out how to collect seeds and how to plant them and to farm.

And just 5,000 years ago, we built the pyramids.

So, who are we? What are we? How did we get here?

Are we some sort of a strange rash on the side of some planet in the middle of nowhere?

Are we an accident that happened to emerge in a way that no one knows quite how in a vast universe where all sorts of things can happen? Are we an accident of physics and chemistry - sort of a more sophisticated colony of bacteria and algae? Sort of like pond scum dressed up in our Sunday suits.

Or, are we the product of a greater intelligence that somehow had the possibility of us in mind 15 billion years ago? Are we some kind of evolutionary leap? Are we the end of the evolutionary line? What the Creator had in mind all along? Or, are we maybe only a link in an evolutionary progression? Is it possible that some baby cloned by a fringe religious sect born into our world last Thursday, if she was, will take our place?

Who are we? What are we? How did we get here?

These are questions, of course, that have no definitive answer. They are questions that we ask again and again. We began asking such questions at some point when we came to our consciousness as human beings, and they are questions we will surely be asking until the day we die.

These questions have no final answer. They are a journey, not a destination. But, as Walt Shropshire says in his classes on Science and Religion at Wesley Theological Seminary, we all need a cosmology. We all need some sense of where we come from and why we are here. Our cosmology needs to have some relationship to the science that we believe. If our cosmology doesn't relate to the science we believe in we will become schizophrenic - living one way Monday through Saturday and another way on Sunday. We can't have a cosmology that ignores the science we live by everyday.

Our cosmology also needs to be informed by our faith, because our cosmology helps us understand who we are and how we are supposed to be.

I'm inviting us, over the next several Sundays to explore the ancient wisdom of Genesis, Chapter One, to see what insights we might find from our ancestors in the faith for our understanding of who we are, what we are, and how we got here.

Genesis, Chapter One, you know, was not the first part of the Bible written. The Bible wasn't written by somebody sitting down and beginning at the beginning and ending at the end. The Bible is a collection of writings that were assembled over the centuries. The first part of the Bible that was actually written was not the creation story in Genesis. The first part of the Bible that was written and recorded was Exodus.

Our faith really begins when a group of slaves in Egypt cried out to God and God heard them and had compassion on them and led them out of slavery into the wilderness where they met God again at Mt. Sinai.

The story of our faith really begins with the Exodus - where our spiritual ancestors first met God in the Exodus. They met a compassionate God who brought them out of slavery into freedom. Then they met God again at Sinai where God gave them commandments and made demands upon their life.

So, the first part of the Bible that was written was the story of Exodus and the first exposure that our

spiritual ancestors had to God was to the compassionate God of the Exodus who also turned out to be the God of righteousness who made commandments at Sinai.

When they had written that part of the Bible, they said, well, maybe we ought to explain how we became slaves in Egypt. So, they drew from the Semitic histories and legends and stories to explain that their father was Abraham and their mother was Sarah, and to explain how Abraham's and Sarah's descendants came to be slaves in Egypt.

After they had written that part of the Bible as a preface to the story of the Exodus, they said maybe we ought to explain how mother Sarah and our father Abraham came to be. So they drew from Mesopotamia histories and legends to tell the stories of Adam and Eve and the Garden and the Tower of Babel.

Then, when they had told that part of the story, they said, well, maybe we'd better explain how it was that Adam and Eve got here. That was when they drew from the science of the Babylonians and wrote the first chapter of the Bible.

They took the science of the Babylonians, which was the most sophisticated science of their day, which told of the creation of the earth in seven days, and they said, we believe that the force that created the world according to the best science that we know was not the gods that the Babylonians believe in, but instead it was the One who we met when we were slaves in Egypt and who had compassion upon us, and whom we met again at Sinai who gave us commandments about how we ought to live. We believe the force from which all things have come is this God of compassion and righteousness. So they rewrote the science of the Babylonians. Interestingly enough, in their rewriting, they made the science of the Babylonians more real, more true to what we believe today.

So, I really think that our task is to listen to the best science that we can learn today - the story of the Big Bang, as scientists playfully call it, and how through 15 billion years, that Big Bang led to this green planet on which we live. And then how that led to the pond scum. And then how that led our ancestors whose knuckles rubbed the ground. And then to us. And to say that the God that we have met in Exodus and Sinai and Jesus Christ is the one who has done this.

There are three things in these first two verses of the book of Genesis that are faith affirmations of our spiritual ancestors, the Israelites, that they believed about any story of creation and that I believe today.

The three affirmations are these:

1. Everything that is was made by God. There is nothing that exists that is not made by God. Everything that is was made by the same God who made us; therefore, there is nothing in all creation which is foreign to us. One of the themes of this first chapter of the book of Genesis is that whenever God made something, God paused to admire it. And then God said, "My, that's good." So, everything in all creation, everything that exists, is good.

This is one of the reasons that the Judeo-Christian faith is very careful when we talk about evil. We do not talk about evil easily. Our belief is that evil exists conditionally and not ontologically. This means that nothing in its own being, by its own nature, is evil. Evil is only conditional, only transitional.

Evil is rebellion against God. It is not something that anybody or anything is. Therefore, we are very careful not to divide the world between things that are good and things that evil - people who are good, people who are evil. All of us are created good. Evil is only a condition that we put ourselves in when we rebel against the love and compassion and justice of God.

This is why the churches and religions tend to oppose capital punishment. We don't think that you can get

rid of evil by killing it. You can get rid of evil only by converting it back to goodness. This is why we are very careful, even as we contemplate war, to understand that no enemy is ever evil by nature. Our goal, even should we resort to war, is not to destroy evil but to retrain evil in order to convert it and to call it back to goodness.

Everything that has emerged from that hot clump of stuff emerged from a wrinkle in the vacuum before time comes from God. Everything that is comes from that, and it is all good.

The second thing our spiritual ancestors believed was this:. Their description of the fluctuation in the vacuum - in the quarks of the vacuum before time - as God's spirit brooding like a bird above the water abyss. They said that it was the wind of God stirring the vacuum that existed before time. The image that they used for the Creator God was an image of restlessness. The image is of a God who had something inside that needed to come out -- like a humming bird just flying around from one place to another -- like a wind stirring when there was a vacuum when there was nothing. It was out of this restlessness within God that the Big Bang exploded. The difference is it was much bigger than our Israelite ancestors ever imagined because they thought it created our solar system when instead the restlessness within God exploded into 125 billion galaxies.

The Israelites believed that there is a restlessness in all things to be born. There is a restlessness inside us to learn and to build and to do and to grow and to become. This restlessness is part of the very nature of Whoever it is who started this whole thing.

Thirdly, our spiritual ancestors, the Israelites, believed that because all things came from this God - this God of compassion and justice and righteousness who they first met in Exodus and at Sinai - because all things came from this God, there is no place that we can go where that God will not be. There is no place that we can go in these 125 billion galaxies where God will not already be - this God of compassion and justice and righteousness.

Even more intimidating, there is no place that we can go within ourselves where this God of compassion and justice and righteousness will not be.

Carl Sandburg said "There is a zoo in me." All of the bacteria and algae and pond scum from which I have come - there is no place that I can go inside of me where the God of compassion and righteousness and justice will not already be.

And there is no place that I can go after this life that this same God will not already be.