

Words Forming Witnesses

The Starting Point

**Psalm 72:1-7 and Genesis 1:27-31
(328, 305, 530, 563)**

January 6, 2013

The Starting Point

Stories help people make sense of their lives.
We are all story tellers and story hearers.

I spent much of my earlier career
helping Presbyterians tell the story
of their life and witness in Canada.
That's what historians do.
They tell stories and help people find meaning in them.

Jill has been writing her own life story –
in small, episodic pieces.
She has gotten some of our grandchildren
interested in the family's history,
especially in the story of their great grandmother, Elizabeth.
She raised five boys on her own in Victoria,
one of whom as Jill's father,
while her husband tried and failed
to make his fortune in South Africa.
One of her other sons, Dick Diespecker,
wrote a slightly fictionalized biography of her.
We've been finding used copies of it on Amazon
and in second-hand bookstores in Victoria
and giving them to our grandchildren.

These are stories of origin,
stories about where we came from, who influenced us,
how our lives might have been shaped
by those who raised and educated us.

Over the past several weeks,
as we lived through another Advent and Christmas season,
we've been remembering the stories of Jesus' earthly beginnings.
And for this coming year,
as we indicated last week,
we're going to follow Mary's example

by pondering all of things that led up to,
and for us, followed from,
those momentous events that happened in the Middle East
so long ago.

Their influence has rippled around the world for generations,
mostly in the form of stories passed on from generation to generation,
along with the meaning those generations made of them.

For the Christian community, the story begins with creation.
That's our starting point.
We have been focusing on the key passage about human beings
in our memory verses this week.

Here they are again:

*So God created humankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.
God blessed them, and God said to them,
"Be fruitful and multiply,
and fill the earth and subdue it;
and have dominion over the fish of the sea
and over the birds of the air
and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."
... And it was so.
God saw everything that he had made,
and indeed, it was very good.*

This is where we begin our year of considering
words that form witnesses,
words from the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit will use
to help us understand better our family history as Christians
and use that understanding to witness
to God's love more faithfully and powerfully.

There are lots of creation stories out there.
In Western culture these days,
the dominant story is told in scientific terms.
Many see that story in fundamental conflict with the Christian story.
I don't.

Science helps us understand how God made it happen.
The Scriptures help us understand why God made it happen.
The Scriptures are not a science text book,
as Christian creationists would like us to believe.
They bring together stories of what God has done and why.

There are three key meanings
that are important to remember in the Christian creation story.
First, human beings, male and female, are created in the image of God.
Second, they are given responsibility for caring for the earth.
Third, this is all seen by God as very good.

What ponderings and practices, then, do these key meanings provoke?

First, if we believe that human beings are created in the image of God,
then they carry that dignity with them
no matter what their circumstances.
We owe them a degree of respect appropriate for a beloved child of God.
They are fellow creatures of a loving God,
connected with us in community by God's creative action
and created for a common purpose –
to glorify God in all that we do and enjoy life in God forever.

So, simply, are you showing yourself and others this kind of respect?
Where is the one place you can improve on this in the coming week?
What can you do to show more respect of this kind?

Second, the common purpose set out in these few verses
in the stewardship and care of the earth, our common home.
We have been entrusted with its care by God.
It belongs to God, not to us.
God ultimately controls how we use its resources,
not our distorted need for control, power, security, possessions, or wealth.

So, simply, are you caring for the earth as God's stewards,
living your lives in ways that share and preserve those resources
in ways that are just, peaceful, and sustainable?
What can you do to exercise better stewardship this coming week?
How can you invite others to do something similar?

Third, God sees that these qualities of relating
to ourselves, our fellow human beings, and our earthly home
are very good.
To live like this is live in companionship and communion with God.
This is our original blessing,
the starting point of God's wondrously creative and dynamic experiment
that we call Earth,
in all of its diversity, interconnectedness, and mutual dependence.
Human beings, us included,
have introduced distortion and destruction into the experiment
by trying to control and exploit everything
without being subject to the guidance and wisdom of the Creator,

without respecting our fellow creatures
and without being faithful to the original purpose.

God calls us,
persistently and continuously,
to return to our original state of blessing,
to find that image of God deep within ourselves,
where God patiently invites us to see things differently,
and to live accordingly in all that we do.

The starting point for us today
in living a more faithful life with and for God
is to own the respect God gave us
when he created us in his own image, both male and female,
then, from that source of strength,
exercise more faithful stewardship over the earth that is our home.
Thus, we will help God make this planet
a very good place to flourish.

*May these thoughts and urgings be used by the Holy Spirit
to form us all for witnessing to the mission of Jesus Christ.*

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