

“I’d Like to Hear a Sermon About: The Science of Creation”  
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 Old Stone Presbyterian Church ~ Lewisburg, West Virginia  
 September 9, 2018

Genesis 2:4b-25

4 b In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, 5 when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; 6 but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— 7 then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground,<sup>[b]</sup> and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. 8 And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

10 A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. 11 The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; 12 and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. 13 The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

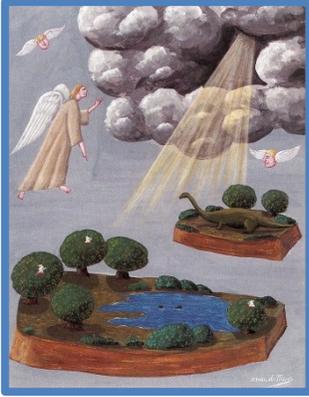
15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

18 Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” 19 So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man<sup>[c]</sup> there was not found a helper as his partner. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;  
 this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.”

24 Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

### “Partners”<sup>1</sup>



*Before there was anything, there was God, a few animals, and a huge swirling glob of rocks and water with no place to go. The angels asked God, “Why don’t you clean up this mess?”*

*So God collected rocks from the huge swirling glob and put them together in clumps and said, “Some of these clumps of rocks will be planets, and some will be stars, and some of these rocks will be... just rocks.”*

*Then God collected water from the huge swirling glob and put it together in pools of water and said, “Some of these pools of water will be oceans, and some will become clouds, and some of this water will be... just water.”*

*Then the angels said, “Well God, it’s neater now, but is it finished? And God answered, “NOPE!”*

*On some of the rocks God placed growing things, and creeping things, and thing that only God knows what they are, and when God had done all of this, the angels asked God, “Is the world finished now?” And God answered: “NOPE!”*

*God made a man and a woman from some of the water and dust and said to them, “I am tired now. Please finish up the world for me... really it’s almost done.” But the man and the woman said, “We can’t finish the world alone! You have the plans and we are too little.”*

*“You are big enough,” God answered them, “But I agree to this, If you keep trying to finish the world, I will be your partner.”*

*The man and the woman asked, “What’s a partner?” And God answered, “A partner is someone you work with on a big thing that neither of you can do alone. If you have a partner, it means that you can never give up, because your partner is depending on you. On the day you think I am not doing enough and on the days I think you are not doing enough, even on those days we are still partners and we must not stop trying to finish the world. That’s the deal.” And they all agreed to that deal.*

*Then the angels asked God, “Is the world finished yet?” and God answered, “I don’t know. Go ask my partners.”*

The story I just shared was written by Rabbi Marc Gellman. It’s what is called a midrash, which most loosely are stories about stories in the Bible. More thoroughly, “Midrash is an interpretive act,<sup>2</sup> [responding] to contemporary problems and crafts new stories, making connections between new... realities and the unchanging biblical text.”

Midrash can be helpful for many reasons, no small part in part because in order for us to really see the Bible sometimes we need to look at it from different directions. Different perspectives. From the top and the underneath. It can expand the nuances of the original language that cannot be translated simply.

<sup>1</sup> Gellman, Marc. Does God Have a Big Toe?: Stories About Stories in the Bible. New York: Harper Collins, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/midrash-101/>

And when it comes to the story of creation, that is particularly helpful.

Gellman's midrash reminds us that creation is not complete or past, but a continual, ongoing process.

It reminds us that God asks less that we be in charge of creation and more that we help God care for creation. We are stewards of creation, not masters.

The Bible is complex when it comes to creation, the Bible is far from clear.

To start, there isn't just one creation story, there are two.

The first in the first chapter of Genesis. The story of the days of creation, the day of rest.

And the second the one we just heard, where God creates Adam from the dust, and Eve the partner to Adam.

Neither of which can possibly be first-person accounts, because nobody was there to see it.

And so, when asked how God could make a person out of dust, the question that led to today's sermon, the most clear answer I can muster is that I don't believe it happened in exactly that way.

I do believe in the God of creation, I don't believe Creation happened in 7-24 hour days. I don't believe God added one breath and add it to dust and a person appeared.

I do believe in the God of creation.

If we take the principle of midrash and look at this text a little differently, there might be another answer. Because, we are made out of dust.

Joni Mitchell sang about it, and "in 1929, the Harvard astronomer Harlow Shapley declared, 'We organic beings who call ourselves humans are made of the same stuff as the stars' — a remarkable observation, considering that at the time nobody even knew what made the stars shine."

As journalist Dennis Overbye<sup>3</sup> wrote a few years ago in the New York Times reporting on how dung beetles use the Milky Way solar system to navigate, "It would be 30 years before [the]... classic paper that the atoms that compose us are not only the same as the ones in stars — most of them were actually manufactured in stars. Starting from primordial hydrogen and helium, denser elements like iron, oxygen, carbon and nitrogen were built up in a series of thermonuclear reactions and then spewed into space when these stars died and exploded as supernovas in a final thermonuclear frenzy. Our atoms were once in stars."

And so, yes. We are dust.

How did it happen? How did creation happen?

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/06/science/space/stars-gold-dung-beetles-and-us.html?adxnnl=1&adxnnlx=1375801282-ZxYRmHGxtCzRJWvZqXRnvg>

I'm not totally sure. The theory of the big-bang and evolution make sense to me, there is so much more going on in the world of science than my liberal-arts background allows.

Science happening at the molecular level, scientists seeing evolution happen as they work with individual strands of DNA.<sup>4</sup>

Science happening at the space level, our solar system, ourselves, born or a super nova.<sup>5</sup>

And is God involved? Yes.

I don't believe science and faith are in conflict.

Neither do I believe they are to separate entities that exist in their own universes.

I believe they are in conversation, one with another.

That, at our best the two fields don't just talk, they are integrated together. Science and faith. Pastors who are scientists. Scientists who are theologians.

Not just in what we do not understand, but in what we do.

Because what I believe is based on what I see, and what I cannot.

What I can prove, and what I cannot. Faith.

I believe in the God of all creating and of all creation. The God of the platypus and the God of the hummingbird. The God of the cocoa bean and the God of kale.

The God of justice, and the God who asks us to care- for creation, for one another.

In a Christian Century piece, Bromleigh McCleneghan writes<sup>6</sup>

The long and the short of evolution and the unfolding work of creation is that things are more complex and more mysterious than we are used to believing. The more theologically comfortable we can get with the notion of complexity and mystery, the more we might find not stumbling blocks to faith but room to incorporate scientists' ever-increasing understanding.

And just one reason why I believe the two different versions of the creation story in Genesis are not a contradiction but are, instead, a gateway into the theological imagination that is our birthright.

Thanks be to God.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://precisionbiosciences.com/our-approach/arcus-genome-editing/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://listverse.com/2018/03/23/10-new-space-discoveries-with-crazy-cosmic-consequences/>

<sup>6</sup> Bromleigh McCleneghan, "Evolution and mystery," for *The Christian Century* Jul 12, 2012  
<http://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2012-07/evolution-and-mystery>