

AFFIRM ONE ANOTHER
Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7; 21-23; John 4: 7-15

Today and the rest of the Sundays of this month, we will examine texts from the Bible that challenge us to see the diversity and value of people on planet earth. Some of the stories need context and explanation. Going to our Bibles with flat-footed literalism or 21st century concepts lead us to conclusions that were never intended. So we will be making our way geographically around the Holy Land this month, learning about the world that God created and the people who God put here. Especially on this Mother's Day, we need to read our Bibles with fresh eyes and hear its message with new insights. Let's start with Genesis and then move to John.

It is so helpful to have the Old Testament available in the original Hebrew. There we learn some things that reading English translations cannot give us: the nuances and phrases in Genesis 1 for example, that sets it apart from Genesis 2:4 and what follows. Sometimes we read our Bibles without reflection, just letting the words spill over our minds, being lulled into acceptance by what we are hearing. "It's the Bible!" some say to themselves. "Who am I to question it?" I believe, and perhaps you believe, that the Bible is the Word of God. That's not in question to me. But making our way through Genesis 1 and 2 gives us—I believe convincingly—two different stories of creation! Do you think that? Do you believe that? Come with me on this journey. The first creation story—again we count on the original language—refers to God as *Elohim*. It has a description of a cosmic God in a majestic drama of creation. In that story, that is so often quoted, it begins: "In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth." Then according to this account, there was nothing before God created. So God created—all with the holy voice, not with hands. "Let there be light;" "Let there be a dome;" "let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place;" "let the earth put forth vegetation;" "let there be lights in the dome of the

sky to separate day from night;” “let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures;” and finally “be fruitful and multiply.” And then *at the end*, God created the beings in whom the most responsibility was being placed: *humans. Together.* God, in a holy dialogue, perhaps with the Godhead of the Trinity, muses: “Let us make humankind in our image.” Here again, in the original language one can tell the difference between “*humankind in our image*” in chapter 1, and *man* listed in chapter 2. “Let’s make the human race, in our image” God says perhaps to the heavenly host. “And God created *them*; male and female God created *them*.” *Men and women were a heavenly triumph, having the ability—like nothing else in creation—to make moral choices, between right and wrong; to be able to choose God as number one, or—sadly—choose other beings or things as number one.* God was watching those choices from the beginning; God still watches, finding either joy or sorrow in our choices that inform the holy heart. But the masterpieces God created were partners made in God’s image, the final creation before God rested.

Then, a second creation story is included without even a paragraph to divide it from the first. It starts in chapter 2 verse 4, giving the English reading persons a clue that *this is a different account*. First, instead of calling God *Elohim* as all of the early account did, this one always calls God *Yahweh*, sometimes called *Jehovah*. Second, one of the first things *Yahweh* God did was to create a man—Hebrew *Adam*—*from which we colloquialized his proper name- Adam. In this creation story we have a **man** created first, not a man and a woman.* Here in this account, the man is created *out of dirt and then God breathed life into him.* Here the place has a name: Eden, and it is a garden where God walks-very different from chapter 1. The location can be found even today near the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers that exist to this day south of Syria. There is very little attention to the creating of the rest of the world in this creation story, but God seems concerned that the man should not be alone, so, in this

account Yahweh God forms *a helper*—very different from the *partner relationship* in Genesis 1. In Genesis 2, the woman is formed out of the man, not out of the earth—very different. Most of the male originated jokes about dominance over women come from this second story that *continues through chapter 3 about the temptation by the serpent. That’s nothing like the first story when the humans were equal partners in humanity.* Today the legacy of the second creation story lives on in exceedingly talented women feeling called and gifted to different ministries, tasks, and professions having a harder time attaining the positions than men. Certainly in some Christian denominations, having a woman senior pastor has not been welcomed they believe it goes against scripture. When a woman became the senior pastor of a church in a certain denomination, that denomination withdrew its financial support to the tune of a million dollars. Because in one part of the Bible 1 Corinthians 14:34, Paul writes (not Jesus, but Paul writes *to a specific community with specific circumstances*): “Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak.” Why would Paul say that? If you know Corinth, you’ll recall Paul also stated one chapter earlier: “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels but have not love, I am as sounding brass or clanging cymbals.” Corinth was filled with men pounding and shaping brass—a very loud trade. It could be heard all over the city during daylight hours. The men had no ear protection from pounding brass all day, and so they grew hard of hearing. In that society—not ours—men were the only ones allowed to be schooled in religion, so the men were charged with listening to their pastor to interpret the Bible to his wife—again because of a first century situation. The husband had to hear the sermon, so the women were asked to be quiet in church so he could hear, and then teach her. Enlightened leaders have learned that sometimes time locked lessons in the Bible call for interpretation for our day. Men and women: are they equal partners as in Genesis one? Or are

women just helpers to men? Some through the ages have grounded themselves in one story or the other.

Jesus as our Savior certainly valued and lifted up women; let's learn from him! We learn about one encounter today and one next week. Jesus went into a territory known as Samaria. During the conquest of the Northern Kingdom by Assyria in 721 B.C.E. Those people went through atrocities not unlike some in Ukraine are facing today. But the conquests changed their country forever, not just months. The mountain on which they worshiped God was Mount Gerizim in modern day Samaria, but David named his Southern Kingdom headquarters as Jerusalem and said only there was God rightly worshipped. The people in the Northern Kingdom were cut off because of their worship activity on a different mountain. Some people from the Northern Kingdom, over time, eventually married non-Jews, and so they were shunned by the Jews for: 1) being unequally yoked to another person; and 2) for not worshipping God in Jerusalem. After that, no God-fearing Jew would walk through Samaria for fear of being called "unclean" by a priest. Nevertheless, Jesus ignored that fear and headed for Samaria—filled with Samaritans—while his disciples objected. He went anyway, stopping by Jacob's famous Well. There he had a most engaging exchange with a woman at the well in the heat of the day—a foolish time to come unless she was perhaps avoiding the stares and comments of other women. When Jesus asked her for some water from the well, she—steeped in tradition asks—"How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" She had been beaten down by her other traditional relationships with men. But Jesus came to save the lost and the broken. He *sees* her; talks with her on an equal level; and makes her believe he might be a prophet because of all he knows about her. It was in this moment that Jesus describes different water—living water—for which people will never thirst again. That woman was transformed from the mores that bound her to

past, to the freedom that Jesus wanted for her and others: that women, children, and men of all races and nationalities feel loved in the eyes of God. Jesus—seeming to lean into the first creation story—saw and lifted up many women while creating a parallel new tradition of the 12 sons of Jacob becoming the 12 apostles. Jesus is our forerunner; he called people to follow him, and certain ones—both men and women—to be pastors or chaplains or elders or deacons or volunteers. Jesus certainly changed the world with the message of new life at Easter. But he also is changing individual lives by noticing them and valuing them. That is something we want to lift up and notice especially on this Mother’s Day. May women feel valued in the eyes of God, and not just for their perception by the eyes of the world.

Let us pray:

Creator God: in Jesus we learned that you are love; not love more to some than others; but love. Help women feel loved, men feel loved, children and youth feel loved. In the name of Jesus who even connected with Samaritans. Amen.

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