

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, Trinity Sunday, June 11, 2017

## **How Did God Do It?**

June 11, 2017

Genesis 1:1-2:3

Our scripture reading this morning about the creation is a poem in seven stanzas. This over 2500 year old poem has caused much theological debate over the years, which is truly unfortunate. How did God do what he did and how long did it take him to do it? Does it really matter? It shouldn't matter but the arguments rage on? Why?

One side of the discussion believes that creation literally took six days, and then God rested. But what is a day to God? It isn't 24 hours --- far from it. It is a long, long time. In several places scripture refers to a day for God being one thousand years, or even longer. Time, for us is significant. For God it is not.

I prefer to look at creation as having happened over six overlapping periods of time of unknown length. As a retired engineer and scientist I surmise that these periods of time were billions of years long in human terms. But, to God, a billion years is more like a blink of an eye.

Again, as I said, does it really matter how long it took God? To me it doesn't matter one bit. The point is that God did it, however long it took in human terms.

That said, remember that the scripture reading is a beautiful poem. *"The need is to move beyond a reading of this majestic song to the creator God as a [literal] narrative and to understand it as an exclamation of praise."*<sup>(1)</sup>

The stanzas of this beautiful hymn are: creation of day and night; separating the waters and the sky; creating the seas and dry land so that vegetation could grow; creating the stars and heavenly bodies; creating life --- the creatures that inhabit the earth, the seas and the birds of the air; and last to create humankind and give humans dominion over the creatures of the earth. As the poem outlines creation, it was very systematic and orderly.

God orders everything and creates everything step by step. But did he do it exactly that way or was it more random? And why, of all things, did he create mosquitos and ticks? We can't be sure if creation was more random than being orderly, but it really does not matter, does it?

Scientists have postulated a Big Bang Theory to explain at least some of how

creation came about, and their theory is plausible and is consistent with the Bible. --- it doesn't contradict scripture. Pope Francis recently said as much. Rather the Big Bang Theory is an attempt to explain how God did what he did. The Big Bang Theory tries to explain how the heavens and the earth came into being on days three and four of the scriptural creation story.

Darwin has long been criticized by fundamentalists for his theories of evolution. His book, "*The Origin of the Species*" raised a huge storm of opposition in some quarters. Was he right or was he wrong?

Put it in the context of the creation story, days five and six, and it fits. It doesn't conflict. It simply is another effort to explain how God did what he did, and today virtually everyone accepts the huge role that evolution has played in the creation of all manner of animal life and vegetation on this earth.

The big debate today is with those who tamper with evolution and try to manipulate it using genetic modification of food, what we call GMOs, to speed up evolutionary change. The debate of whether or not genetic modification is good or not goes on, but, whether or not it is good, it is a plausible explanation of how God did much of animal and plant creation.

Scientists will continue to try to explain how God did what he did. They will expound new theories and discard old ones but it is important to remember that science is not at war with religion. Not at all!

Most scientists and engineers that I have known, and do know, are religious. They aren't fighting to get rid of faith. They are instead simply trying to explain how God accomplished this miracle of creation.

One thing they will never be able to do, however, is to explain how God created all of what we see, feel, touch and hear out of nothing --- absolutely nothing.

And remember that the story in Genesis is a poem, not a literal reporting of known fact. To see better what I mean, consider this short story written by Isaac Azimov to explain how Moses dictated the creation story to Aaron so that Aaron could write it down on a papyrus scroll.

**M**y brother began to dictate in his best oratorical style, the one which has the tribes hanging on his words.

“In the beginning,” he said, “exactly 15.2 billion years ago, there was a big bang and the Universe—”

But I had stopped writing. “Fifteen billion years ago?” I said incredulously.

“Absolutely,” he said. “I’m inspired.”

“I don’t question your inspiration,” I said. (I had better not. He’s three years younger than I am, but I don’t try questioning his inspiration. Neither does anyone else or there’s hell to pay.) “But are you going to tell the story of the Creation over a period of fifteen billion years?”

“I have to,” said my brother. “That’s how long it took. I have it all in here,” he tapped his forehead, “and it’s on the very highest authority.”

By now I had put down my reed pen. “Do you know the price of papyrus?” I said.

“What?” (He may be inspired, but I frequently noticed that the inspiration didn’t include such sordid matters as the price of papyrus.)

I said, “Suppose you describe one million years of events to each roll of papyrus. That means you’ll have to fill fifteen thousand rolls. You’ll have to talk long enough to fill them, and you know that you begin to stammer after a while. I’ll have to write enough to fill them, and my fingers will fall off. And even if we can afford all that papyrus and you have the voice and I have the strength, who’s going to copy it? We’ve got to have a guarantee of a hundred copies before we can publish, and without that where will we get royalties from?”

My brother thought a while. He said, “You think I ought to cut it down?”

“Way down,” I said, “if you expect to reach the public.”

“How about a hundred years?” he said.

“How about six days?” I said.

He said, horrified, “You can’t squeeze Creation into six days.”

I said, “This is all the papyrus I have. What do *you* think?”

“Oh, well,” he said, and began to dictate again, “In the beginning— Does it have to be six days, Aaron?”

I said, firmly, “Six days, Moses.”

As I said at the start of this message, does it really matter how God did what he did or how long it took?

I think not. God created us and everything else in this world and in the heavens above. Instead of questioning the steps he used to do it and how long it took, we should praise and thank him for his incredible creation.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,

**Amen.**

1. Walter Bruggemann, et al, "Texts for Preaching - Year A," Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 1995.
2. Isaac Asimov, "*How it Happened*", a short story.

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*Liturgical color - white*

**This is the day the Lord has made.  
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

Announcements

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

**Many: And also with you.**

Call to Worship

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit  
be with all of you.  
Let us worship God.

\*Opening Hymn      "Come, Thou Almighty King" #139

Opening Prayer

Holiness, Word, Power,  
you reveal yourself  
as one God in three persons,  
a mighty, creative, life-generating dancer  
who invites your creation to join you.  
Catch us up in your love  
and lead us into your world  
to call others to follow you  
with singing and rejoicing. **Amen.**

Prayer Response Inside front cover of hymnal – In Unison

*Hear Our Prayer, O Lord, Hear Our Prayer, O Lord, Incline Thine ear to us, And grant us Thy peace. Amen.*

Psalm of Praise Psalm 8, a psalm of David. Pew Bible page 845.

**Please read the even numbered verses responsively**

<sup>1</sup> LORD, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory

in the heavens.

<sup>2</sup> **Through the praise of children and infants**

**you have established a stronghold against your enemies,**

**to silence the foe and the avenger.**

<sup>3</sup> When I consider your heavens,

the work of your fingers,

the moon and the stars,

which you have set in place,

<sup>4</sup> **what is mankind that you are mindful of them,**

**human beings that you care for them?**

<sup>5</sup> You have made them a little lower than the angels

and crowned them with glory and honor.

<sup>6</sup> **You made them rulers over the works of your hands;**

**you put everything under their feet:**

<sup>7</sup> all flocks and herds,

and the animals of the wild,

<sup>8</sup> **the birds in the sky,**

**and the fish in the sea,**

**all that swim the paths of the seas.**

<sup>9</sup> LORD, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

### Call to Confession

Creation displays the glory of God,  
but our sin keeps us from rejoicing  
in the love God reveals.

Yet Christ Jesus the Son carried our sins to the cross,  
and the Holy Spirit breathes new life into us  
so that we can praise God,  
our Maker, Savior, and life-giving Lover.

Let us confess our sins,  
that we may receive such grace.

### Prayer of Confession (Unison)

**Presence, Life, Fire,  
God who is Three in One,  
we confess that we have turned away from you.  
We gaze upon ourselves  
as if we are worthy of worship.  
We take your creation into our hands,  
not to love, but to use and then to discard.  
We go to the people of the land,  
not to serve, but to press them into our service.  
We do not deserve that you would even notice us,  
but we pray for mercy because you are merciful.  
Flame of Love, purify us from sin;  
Eternal Now, lead us to your truth;  
Risen One, baptize us into union with you.  
Transform us into faithful disciples who worship you alone,  
God who is Trinity. Amen.**

### Assurance of God's Pardon

The Holy One of Israel,  
the Redeemer of all the world,

and the Holy Spirit who comes as the breath of new life  
forgets the sins of all who repent.

I declare to you, therefore, that you are forgiven,  
in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
one God, Mother of us all.

\*Gloria Patri #579– In Unison

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the  
beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen*

Children's' Message

Prayer for Illumination

Sing into our ears, O Spirit, the holy word of life.  
Tell us who we are and to whom we belong  
so that we may live with gratitude for all that  
you have done. **Amen.**

Old Testament Lesson Genesis 1:1-2:3, Pew Bible, pages1- 3

<sup>1</sup> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

<sup>3</sup> And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. <sup>4</sup> God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup> God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

<sup>6</sup> And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water."

<sup>7</sup> So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. <sup>8</sup> God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

<sup>9</sup> And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. <sup>10</sup> God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

<sup>11</sup> Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so.

<sup>12</sup> The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>13</sup> And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

<sup>14</sup> And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, <sup>15</sup> and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. <sup>16</sup> God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. <sup>17</sup> God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, <sup>18</sup> to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup> And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup> And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” <sup>21</sup> So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>22</sup> God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” <sup>23</sup> And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup> And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so. <sup>25</sup> God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, <sup>[a]</sup> and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

<sup>27</sup> So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

<sup>29</sup> Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. <sup>30</sup> And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.”  
And it was so.

<sup>31</sup> God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

<sup>1</sup> Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

<sup>2</sup> By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup> Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

\*Congregational Hymn      “For the Beauty of the Earth” #473

Sermon      **“How Did God Do It?”**      Dr. Kenneth Humphreys

Anthem "All Creatures of Our God And King", Hallelujah for the Cross (© 2014 First Company Management. Used by Permission. CCLI License 11224027) (CD 25, Tr. 1)

*\*Affirmation of Faith Apostles' Creed, ecumenical version. (Unison)*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. AMEN.**

Tithes and Offerings

Jesus sends his disciples into the world  
to bless all by his grace.

With God's love, in the Holy Spirit,  
let us make this our offering to God.

\*Doxology #592 – In Unison

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below; Praise Him above, ye heavenly host: Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer (responsive)

When the words "God of all goodness" are said, please respond "**hear our prayer.**"

In accord with God's command that we hold  
dominion over creation,  
let us pray for the church, the world, and all  
for whom we are called to be stewards.

We give you thanks, O God, for our world, which you  
made and renewed in the power of Jesus' resurrection.

Make us wise and careful of your gifts as we live on Earth.

God of all goodness, **hear our prayer.**

We pray that the love which passes ceaselessly  
between the Father and the Son in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
may renew and deepen the life of each Christian  
and draw us all into your unending life.

God of all goodness, **hear our prayer.**

For the leaders of the church:

for Protestants, Roman Catholics, and the Orthodox;

for Sunday school children and youth;

for the elderly whose wise counsel is sorely needed in all ages;

and for all ecumenical endeavors

that seek to bring us closer to each other and to you.

God of all goodness, **hear our prayer.**

For Earth and all creatures and plants; for healthy water and air and soil;

for policies and laws that regard our home in God's universe

as a precious gift.

God of all goodness, **hear our prayer.**

For our families, our households, and our communities,

that your life together—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—

may show us the like importance of each of us,

and so strengthen us in your grace and truth.

God of all goodness, **hear our prayer.**

For the sick and those who suffer in any way;  
for those who struggle to pay rent or a mortgage;  
for those who have no home;  
for those who are neglected and abused in our communities;  
for people who long for family and are instead alone;  
for children who do not have a good guide to raise them up;  
and for whatever else you see that we need.

God of all goodness, **hear our prayer.**

For all those needs still unnamed but placed before you now,  
either silently or aloud . . .

*[A time of silence is kept.]*

God of all goodness, **hear our prayer.**

Into your hands we entrust all that is of concern this day,  
sure that you hear our pleas,  
grateful that your will be done on earth as in heaven.

We pray this in the name of the Savior, Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Let us pray now as our Lord taught us, **Our Father... Amen.**

\*Closing Hymn      "I Sing the Mighty Power of God" #288

\*Charge and Blessing

You are one with Christ. He will be with you always.  
You have received the Holy Spirit. She breathes into you new life.  
You are sealed in the love of God, who will keep you forever.

*[Pointing to the doors that lead outward]*

The eternal Creator calls us.

The risen Savior sends us.

The dynamic Spirit empowers us.

Go into all the world, making disciples for Jesus Christ.

Go in peace! Serve the Lord!