

Genesis 2:4-15

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, 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; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. 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. A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

Genesis 2:16-23

And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 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.”

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” 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. (time out)

Don't you kind of wish Adam had been a bit more creative with his names. You know, instead of:^ASeagull, go with Beach Chicken.

Instead of ^BManatee, how about Floaty Potato?

And I definitely thing we should stop calling them snakes, and instead go with ^CNope Ropes.

Okay, back to Scripture:

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 there was not found a helper as his partner.

^A Beach Chicken

^B Floaty Potato

^C Nope Rope

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. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 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."

The story of God for the people of God... **Thanks be to God.**

In grade school there was no class that I made more effort in with less to show for it than art class. I was – and am – terrible at art. My art projects ranged from an attempt at a 3D drawing that evolved from train tracks to a scribbly mess that became so undefined I had to draw an arrow to it and write ‘train’ – unfortunately, I forgot to draw the arrow in 3D.

One year we worked on watercolors that we painted based on a picture we found in a magazine. I chose a bird in a tree and I spent time painstakingly tracing and drawing and re-drawing and then watering down the paper and mixing the colors just right. I titled it ‘Robin Red-Breast in a Sycamore Tree’.

When it was returned to me my art teacher had retitled it: “Blob on a Stick”.

In eighth grade, three pottery wheels were brought into the classroom and names were drawn to determine who would get to use them. When I saw my teacher’s face fall, I knew that she had drawn my name.

Do you know what’s harder than it looks?
Making pottery.

Every art class I sat down, took out a fresh piece of clay, threw it on the wheel, wet it down, spun it and gently formed with my hands... the most awkward looking paper weights anyone has ever seen. The only good news is that I was not the only one who lacked the finesse needed to be a competitor on The Great Pottery Throw Down.

Our teacher tried, she really did, but after a class filled with our futile attempts she would tell us to throw the clay into a galvanized trash can she had in the corner.

We learned how to use our thumbs to press an opening into the top of the clay... and I learned – repeatedly – not to press too hard (clay tossed away).

We learned how to use tools to gently press designs into the side... or cut right through the clay ruining the entire project (clay tossed away).

We learned how to use a wire to remove our creation from the wheel... or aim too high and cut a hole in the bottom (clay tossed away).

Clay tossed away. Clay tossed away. Clay tossed away.

In Scripture we find two creation stories back-to-back. The first is in a pattern, like a liturgy:

In the beginning... it was good.

God created... and it was good.

God made... and it was good.

And on the seventh day, God rested.

In Genesis 1 God is Creator – and God is sovereign; creating with voice and distance.

In Genesis 2 a different storyteller takes over.

The first is liturgy – call and response; the second is narrative – down and dirty.

God is the intimate giver of life; a Potter shaping ‘adam’ out of the ground (‘adamah’) – which means “human” not “man.” God needs this being to till and keep the garden. And yet, God did not create a slave simply there to do what God demands. God cares about this creation and we know because the Lord God notices when this creation – this Adam - is lonely. And God decides to make him a partner.

And so God starts experimenting... and repeatedly fails to make the partner that Adam needs.

God gets the hands dirty up to the elbows; a Potter shaping the ground into a human creation.

God is a Life-breather, filling human creation with Holy breath;

God is a Gardener, planting trees out of pure joy and deep love for this creation;

God is an Artist, making pigs and parrots, cows and eagles, kittens and hippos in an effort to make the one human complete.

And Adam is invited to join in the fun – name all the things – and he does...

Although he goes with ^DRacoon instead of Trash Panda.

Still... the animals are not enough. The human is lonely.

And so God goes back to the drawing board, and reworks the original creation, Adam, the one who carries the breath of God inside of him. He, too, is a work in progress it seems, incomplete until he loses a piece of himself.

And so once again, God rolls up the sleeves, gets in up to the elbows... and creates.

God does not create a subordinate – like the animals of the field and the birds of the air.

God creates an equal – a partner, literally created from Adam’s side to be by his side as long as Adam stands by hers: *bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.*

We are the same.

^D Trash Panda

Human creation only becomes complete because we are in relationship with one another. And this isn't just about marriage... of any kind. God spins the wheel and makes a fertile garden of flowing rivers, and all the trees and animals you can imagine but it's not enough... until finally – God makes community.

Human community as God molded it to be is mutual support among equals. We are God-breathed, God-shaped, God-created – God's thumb print is on us - and yet, without fellowship and partnership with one another – we are lonely.

God alone is not enough.
God made us for community, to be with one another.

When the human saw the next human, he didn't focus on their differences. He was so happy, so relieved, that he exclaimed, *"At last... bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."*

What would the world look like if we saw strangers like Adam sees Eve?
What if our default wasn't sizing people up, but was instead welcoming them in?

You, the refugee; you the immigrant;
You who is Black, white, Asian, old, or young;
You who is male or female or gender non-conforming or non-binary or trans;

You... who are bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.

We are humans.
We are community.

Why do we throw each other away?
Why do we dismiss one another when we spot any kind of perceived flaw?

You disagree with me... (clay tossed away).
You are not from the same country as me... (clay tossed away).
You don't look or act like me... (clay tossed away).

In art class the students always went for the new clay. But my teacher would roll up her sleeves and dig into the trash can for what had been tossed away. I remember watching her, literally scraping the bottom of the barrel... and undaunted by the brokenness and the imperfections; she would create something beautiful.

It's a dirty job.
Yet God the great Potter, is still up to the elbows in us – the clay.
God is still forming and reforming us into new relationship and new communities.

Where no one gets tossed away.

In the name of the Creator, the Christ and the Holy Spirit. Amen.