

Genesis 1, Romans 8, John 1: a sermon for the Feast of Creation

*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu melekh ha'olam hatov v'ha'meitiv*: Blessed are you, Lord God, creator and ruler of the universe, who is good and causes good, amen.

In Genesis, nearly the first thing we're told about creation is that it is good, and God sees that it is good. Not just in a sweeping general way, but each new building block that Creator makes is specifically named and called good: the sky and the waters, the sun, moon, and stars, every plant and fish and bird and mammal, and even human beings. So very, very good.

It feels important to point this out and celebrate it, because often in the history of Christianity the essential goodness of creation has been swept under the rug, denigrated, or denied. Western culture has viewed creation as a vassal to be subjugated, or a threat to be neutralized. So we want to remind each other that God's creation is first and foremost, and without any intervention, *good*.

In the introduction to her dazzling book of interviews, *What If We Get It Right?*, marine biologist Ayana Elizabeth Johnson tells the story of visiting Key West as a 5 year-old, on the single family vacation of her childhood. Touring in a glass-bottomed boat, she fell head over heels in love with the teeming parrotfish, wrasses, and tangs swimming below.

She writes: "Do you recall being a little kid, mouth agape at the magic of forests or dinosaurs or goldfish or the moon or ants? Do you remember the encompassing amazement? Though few of us become academically trained scientists, we can all share a curiosity about and love of nature. And this biophilia can be a powerful driving force."

One of my favorite moments in this year's Easter season was when I asked you, during the Thanksgiving for Baptism, to shout out names of the waters you love. "Lake Superior," many of you said. Others named creeks and rivers and lakes of your heart. The same can be true for a patch of woods or a garden spot. When you love something, you want to take care of it.

But, as you know, it is also entirely possible to mutely watch as someone or something you love drifts away into death or destruction. It is possible to feel so helpless that you are unable to act. And that is why we need hope. Or else, as Rebecca Solnitt notes, "We transform the future's unknowability into something certain, the fulfillment of all our dread, the place beyond which there is no way forward. But again and again, far stranger things happen than the end of the world." <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Solnitt, *Hope in the Dark*, 2004.

Johnson's book points out that the solution to climate change, mass extinction events, lead in the drinking water of children, and every other entrenched environmental problem, is *not* to flounder in the grim statistics, although they are grim and we need to know them. The solution lies in reminding people to love the places they hold dear, like the coral reefs of Key West. And then, and equally important, *using* the knowledge and technologies that *already exist* for *tikkun olam*, the healing of the world.

So, yes, this is a sermon about the wrongs we have done and need to put right, as we admitted in this morning's Confession and Forgiveness. But more than that it is a sermon about Christian love and hope.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

Even for people who grew up going to Sunday school, it's sometimes a bit of a surprise to hear that God's Word, which is to say Christ, was already present in the very beginning of Creation. Wait, what about little baby Jesus, lying in a manger, born, born, born in Bethlehem? Honestly, I'm not going to be able to clarify today what 2000 years of Trinitarian theology has not been able to grasp, so just trust me on this. In some mystical way Christ, being God, has always been and always will be.

And then at some point the Word became flesh and lived among us, and ate at the McDonald's with the teenagers and their multiple piercings, and shook his head commiserating with the crew working on the water main break. Out of care for creation—of which we are a part—God came in person and made Godself subject to the same relations with this work that we have: gravity, wonder, thirst, humility. And then showed us that new life is always possible, even in the midst of death or what seems like death. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not, cannot, overcome it.

Our hope, then, isn't the naïve wishful thinking that everything is going to turn out just the way we want. We've been around the block too many times to believe that. But we remember that, despite millennia of us failing to get with the program, God hasn't given up on us yet. So it is far too soon for us to give up either. Or as Solnitt comments, "It is always too early to go home, and always too early to calculate the effect." Date palm seeds stored in the time of Herod can still germinate. The seeds of change planted now might just have similar staying and growing power.

Paul's letter to the Romans, written in freedom after living in captivity, reminds us that desperate circumstances don't have to lead to despair. In fact sometimes it's those in the grip of the greatest desperation who can somehow grab hold of the greatest hope: "For in

hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

Johnson too challenges us to cast our nets beyond what we can see or hope to accomplish on our own: “There’s a right thing to do and a wrong thing to do, and why wouldn’t I do the right thing just because it might not have the outcome I want?” Her title formulation turns our usual fear on its head: what if we get it wrong? Well, there’s grace for that. But what if, just what if we get it right? Not only our actions on the part of the planet, but all the risky, loving things we can imagine for the sake of the other.

We lean into hope, because God has brought us this far along the way. We lean into hope because we believe that the Holy Spirit can lead us into radical change, beginning with our very selves. And we lean into hope, because hope fuels concrete action and the possibility of reconciliation, not only with our human neighbors but also piping plovers and the Bad River wetlands. We lean into hope, because we are held and carried by this Earth and all of God’s creation.

And it is very good. Amen.